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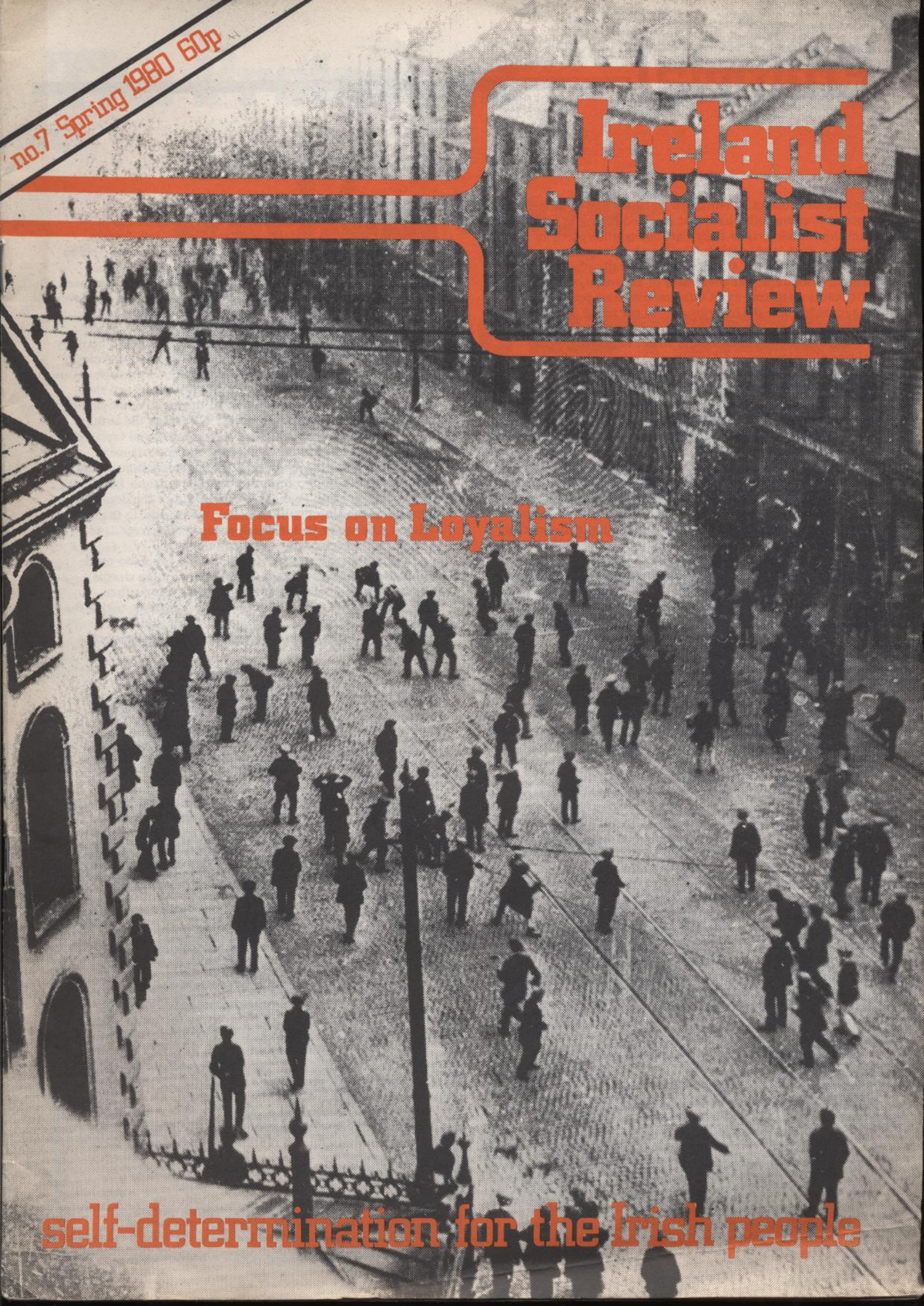
# Ireland Socialist Review



## Focus on Loyalism

self-determination for the Irish people

# Editorial

The internal politics of Northern Ireland's one million-strong Protestant community have not received the same attention from the British Left as their Catholic counterparts. In many ways this is understandable. The long battle against British domination in the Six Counties has naturally placed the Catholic community at the centre of attention, with the Protestants operating as an unattractive mass pressure group on successive British Governments to get tough with Irish nationalism in all its forms.

But this long-standing failure to get to grips with the politics of Unionism and Loyalism has undoubtedly proved detrimental to the need for a broad political analysis of the Northern Ireland state. Articles attempting to explain splits amongst the Unionist populace are all too often simple, journalistic descriptions without any solid implications for an understanding of the internal dynamics of Protestant political life.

A common assumption is that the description of Unionism and Loyalism as right wing movements is adequate for most purposes of explanation. But for a British audience, the term right wing carries with it a whole set of implications about the political programme of the movement; i.e. anti-working class, hatred of trade unions, opposition to the welfare state and state intervention in the economy etc.

The weakness of applying these standards of right wing politics to the followers of Paisley, Kilfedder, Molyneux *et. al.* has been noted by a number of 'two nations' theorists. It is certainly true that Protestant workers cannot be simply dismissed as supporters of British Toryism and in many ways their political attitudes are not a million miles away from the social democracy of sections of the British trade union and labour movement.

Some opponents of Irish nationalism in the British labour movement have gone to the extent of generating their own myths about the alleged progressiveness of Protestant workers. These groups range from the small Labour Campaign for Representation in Ireland through to the supporters of the 'Militant' tendency, and a few sections of the British Communist Party. These groups all have an extremely optimistic view of the capacity for economic struggles over issues such as wages and employment to provide the basis for a socialist programme uniting the Northern Ireland working class: an argument which is very hard to sustain in the light of the historical evidence to the contrary.

Is there an alternative view of the Protestant working class that avoids the pitfalls of regarding it as either uniformly reactionary or uniformly progressive? Three of the articles in this issue of ISR have a direct bearing on the answer to this question. Firstly, Geoff Bell, in *The Protestant Working Class – still 'no surrender'*, provides us with a statement of the argument from a more or less orthodox left wing view. Bell examines the splits within the major Loyalist parties over the last decade and asks if these developments have any class content insofar as they might increase the polarisation between Protestant labour and Unionist capital.

Bell concedes that the leaderships of these latter-day Unionist parties appear to have 'bread and butter' issues closer to their hearts than the previous generation of Unionist leaders, but still the insistence on support for the partitioning of Ireland presents an absolute block to the development of socialist politics amongst these workers.

In order to throw light on present-day problems of analysis, Bob Purdie returns to a period when the specifically Labourist response of the Protestant working class in Belfast was a good deal stronger than it is today. *Belfast Labourism 1905-25* presents us with the full extent of the dilemma of the Protestant labour movement. We read of a working class movement which was capable of appealing to advanced socialist internationalism in its arguments against Irish nationalism – yet still allied itself with the extremes of Protestant reaction in defence of the Union with Britain. Purdie's analysis suggests that there is nothing in principle to prevent a certain level of socialist ideology gaining broad support amongst Protestant workers in certain circumstances, but the ultimate limitations of any progress made at this level will be judged by the stand taken on the national question.

The third and final article in this discussion is Richard Chessum's extended review of the recently published book by Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, *The State in Northern Ireland*. A main part of the discussion in this book concerns the nature of the class alliances between Protestant workers and the Unionist bourgeoisie which provided the social underpinning to the State in the period up until 1972 (when the authors claim the Northern Ireland state was smashed and replaced by the UK State). Bew *et al* discount the importance of notions of 'nation' and 'nationality' as explanations of the maintenance of the Protestant cross-class alliance. Instead they draw attention to the overt populism of the dominant fraction of the Unionist ruling class, which was, in their opinion, the major factor which ensured that Protestant workers were kept on the side of the Union.

Each of these three articles has its own points to make about the complexity of the Protestant working class in Northern Ireland. Hopefully they will provide further discussion and investigation around these themes, taking the present level of analysis beyond the present simplistic tendency to see the Orange working class as either wholly evil or wholly good.

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In other articles in this issue, Keith Savage reviews some of the latest developments in the politics of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the major Catholic party in the North. Once again, the SDLP is frequently dismissed by the British Left without any of its ideas being properly discussed or understood. Readers should find this piece enlightening in this respect.

Similarly, many people on the Left in Britain have only the dimmest idea of the politics of the Provisional Sinn Fein in Ireland and the type of debates which take place within that party. All too often this lack of knowledge leads to the PSF being dismissed as simple right wing nationalists, or even as proto-fascists. Readers who have inclined in this direction will therefore find the report on the recent Ard Fheis (National Conference) of the PSF particularly interesting. The importance of socialist ideas to the debate within the party, and the impact which movements such as feminism has had on sections of its membership, is explained by Sue O'Halloran, the PSF Press Officer in Britain.

We are aware that some readers will disagree with O'Halloran's assessment of the political developments at the Ard Fheis. We look forward to receiving the various views on this subject for publication in a future edition of *ISR*.

Finally, once again we have had to increase the price of *ISR*. The new price, 60p, represents something closer to the economic cost of producing a left journal by an independent editorial collective with limited financial resources. We are confident that readers who appreciate the importance of Ireland to the development of Marxist politics in Britain will understand that 60p still represents good value for the work *ISR* is engaged in.

Articles and correspondence should be addressed to:
Ireland Socialist Review, 60 Loughborough Road, London SW9.

# The Protestant working class – still 'no surrender'

## Geoff Bell

If, ten years ago someone had predicted that by 1980 the Unionist Party would be split into half a dozen pieces; that the Orange Order would be in decline; that Ian Paisley would be posing as a respectable moderate – such a prophet would have been burnt at some polemical stake as a heretic.

And yet here we are, in 1980 and such developments have indeed occurred. Paisley, by agreeing to participate in the Tory Government's constitutional conference on the North of Ireland, in contrast to the Official Unionists' boycott has been described as conciliatory and reasonable. The once all-mighty Unionist Party has divided into half-a-dozen parts. The Orange Order, membership of which was once obligatory for any aspiring Unionists politician, is no longer guaranteed a seat at the tables of power.

It is important to emphasise the extent of these changes. For 50 years the Unionist Party oversaw the governance of the North of Ireland to the extent that the Six Counties took on the appearance of a one-party state. Despite that rule being accompanied by disastrous economic and social effects, the Unionist all class alliance which had been first established in the preceeding century remained solid. There had been the odd challenge here, the odd desertion there, but the hegemony that the Unionist Party enjoyed over the Protestant population of the North of Ireland continued.

Just listing the various contemporary Unionist parties shows how all that has changed. There is the Democratic Unionist Party, the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, the United Ulster Unionist Party, the Alliance Party, the Ulster Progressive Unionist Party. If other pro-partitionist parties which do not have their roots in the former Unionist Party are included there is the Northern Ireland Labour Party and the United Labour Party, Still more – the Dominion Party and Vanguard have come and gone in the last decade.

As well as this proliferation the most dramatic change in Protestant politics has been the decline of the Unionist Party, now named the Official Unionist Party. The decline was graphically illustrated in last year's European election when the single DUP candidate (Paisley) received 170,688 first preference votes and the two OUP candidates received a total of 127,169. Totally up the percentage of votes cast for the various pro-partition parties the official Unionists managed only 22.8 per cent of all votes cast compared with 44.4 per cent for the rest.

The most popular British media explanation for the decline of the Official Unionists is the charisma of its leading challenger – Ian Paisley of the Democratic Unionist Party.

Undoubtedly this is a factor, but it is somewhat disparaging to the population of the North of Ireland to suggest that it decides its political allegiance on the basis of a candidate's personality. It is all the more foolish a suggestion considering the politicisation that Northern Irish society has gone through in the last ten years.

But if politics rather than such nebulous concepts as 'personality' determines voters' allegiances, what than explains the shift in these allegiances, on the Protestant side in the last ten years?

Before discussing that question it is important to establish just who has shifted and who has not. Evidence concerning this was provided in last years general election results in the North of Ireland.

The most striking advance was achieved by the DUP who captured the North Belfast and East Belfast seats from the Official Unionists. Similarly in the North Down constituency Jim Kilfedder retained his seat despite changing his party label from OUP to independent. It was of more than passing significance that Kilfedder was supported by the DUP.

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The Belfast results were important because it was the first concrete evidence that Paisley had established a real base upon among the Protestant working class. Previously the DUP had been seen as the voice of the Protestant petty-bourgeoisie. The election in May 1979 implied that this had now been extended to the industrial working class. In this sense the DUP may be seen as beginning to resemble the all-class alliance nature of the old Unionist Party. What the DUP doesn't have – or at least there is no evidence to suggest as such – is the support of the Protestant upper or middle class. But that provides little comfort for the party managers of the OUP because in that area too this party found its base eroding; this time in the direction of Alliance who in the general election increased their total vote in the more prosperous constituencies of South Antrim and South Belfast.

What this implies is that the divisions which have emerged within Unionism in the last ten years correspond, at least in part to social divisions.

It is also worth noting that these divisions are likely to persist. Esmond Thomson, a leading Official Unionist recently remarked that he saw 'little hope of restoring Unionist unity this side of a Northern armageddon' (*Irish Times* 9/7/79).

The depth of the divisions and the fact that they appear to approximate to – even if in the most general or partial sense – to class divisions may seem a cause for celebration for socialists on both sides of the Irish Sea. Since the foundation of the Northern state the (Official) Unionist Party, controlled and so nakedly run in the interests of the Protestant bourgeoisie had, despite the social and economic deprivations of all sections of the working class, enjoyed the consistant backing of the major, that is the Protestant section of that working class. That this no longer prevails may suggest hope for the future, among those who look for independent class consciousness among Protestant workers.

But before the celebrations begin it has to be answered as to why this break-up in the all-class alliance has developed in the past ten years when it didn't, for instance in the 1930's when the social and economic conditions in the Protestant working class were worse than today. Of course in the 1930's there was the occasional split from the Official Unionists in which social and economic questions were raised, but there was nothing remotely comparable to the splits of the last decade.

An explanation that could be offered as to what has changed is that the consciousness of a significant section of the Protestant working class has changed. Possible support for such a hypothesis could be found in the fact that Ian Paisley has, in the past taken up social and economic issues. He is known to be a good constituency MP, in the past he made great play of the lack of toilet facilities in his constituency; he has even advocated the nationalisation of Lough Neagh and its fishing grounds.

Similarly another founder of the DUP, Desmond Boal, who broke away from the officail Unionists also criticised his former party's social policies and he was the first Unionist MP in the history of the Northern state to set up a surgery in his constituency.

Apart from the DUP it is also worth noting that many of the leaders of the various loyalist, extra-parliamentary organisations which have sprang up since 1968 have impecable working class and trade union credentials. Billy Hull, who led a strike at Harland and Wolfe shipyards in 1972 in demand of internment was a leading AUEW shop steward at the yards. The present leader of the Ulster Defence Association, Andy Tyrie is himself a former shop steward. Indeed the growth of organisations such as the UDA, composed of and led by members of the Protestant working class and petty-bourgeoisie is further evidence of the failure of the Protestant bourgeoisie to retain control of all political activity in the Protestant Community.

But before such developments can be heralded as representing a growth of class consciousness among Protestant workers it remains imperative to analyse why the break up of the all-class alliance has occured and on what basis the Protestant workers have distanced themselves from their former leaders.

Do the sociological divisions within Unionism reflect class divisions in the political sense? The importance of answering such a question is obvious: if there has been a significant growth of working class consciousness in the Protestant community, then clearly the opportunity for winning Protestant workers to the cause of socialism has significantly increased during the last ten years.

## 'Socialism'

That raises the question of what is defined as 'socialism' For the moment let us use that word in its most 'moderate' sense as it is understood in the context of British social democracy. Such a definition is relevant because the possiblity of winning Protestant workers to the British Labour Party has attracted some controversy of late. Involved here is an advocacy to extend Labour Party organisation to the North of Ireland.

This campaign has been conducted under the auspices of an organisation calling itself the Campaign for Labour Representation, (CLR) a body mainly constituted by one time members or supporters of the Workers' Association, which in turn had its roots in the British and Irish Communist Organisation, which attracted attention in Ireland in the early 1970 s because of its thesis that Ireland was 'two nations'. This theory bestowed a legitimacy on the partition of Ireland.

**Another generation waves the flag (From Camerawork)**

Homer Sykes

The arguments of the CLR have at times been couched in attractively progressive terms. For example there is the following letter which appeared in *Tribune*.

'As a socialist I am not only concerned with ending the war in Northern Ireland but also with the development of working class politics and the eradication of the traditional political divisions. The basis will be laid for this if the (British) Labour Party faces up to its responsibilities to the working class and extends its organisation to the province' (*Tribune* 14/9/79).

The emphasis on 'working class politics' as a solution to the North of Ireland is also reflected in the position of the Militant grouping in the Labour Party. Militant, while supporting – on paper – the withdrawal of British troops argue that the means to such withdrawal lies in cementing working class unity, via the trade unions, and a concentration on what it terms as 'class issues', that is wages, jobs, houses. The first difficulty with such a view is that when it has been tested in practice it has come unstuck.

In the 1979 general election Jeff Dudgeon, a CLR advocate stood as a candidate of 'Labour Integration' in South Belfast. He received 1.47 per cent of the total vote. In the same election Bill Webster of the Irish Militant stood in Derry under the banner of Labour Trade Unionist. He polled one per cent, and his vote actually fell from when he stood in the previous election.

The point about the rather unhappy electoral fate of Dudgeon and Webster is that their poor results argue against the very analysis of CLR and Militant which suggest that as long as 'class issues' are stressed with enough force they will attract significant support from a working class straining at the leash for its chance to put its 'x' against the cause of working class unity.

But if that did not happen in the general election what did determine how Protestants, and particularly Protestant workers voted?

An indication can be found in the manner in which the general and European elections were waged in the North of Ireland, and the issues on which various Unionist parties chose to concentrate in an attempt to win votes; also the issues they have since chosen to highlight in their battle for the Protestant majority.

In the general election the DUP's manifesto spelt out that as far as that party was concerned the 'security' situation overshadowed everything else. The manifesto demanded that, 'Ulster be put on a war footing'. This involved 'full-time border security' and capital punishment for those guilty of the 'heinous murders' commited by the IRA.

The DUP also called for an end to 'colonial type of direct rule' and argued, 'only a strong devolved Parliament and Government based firmly on the tried and trusted principles of British democracy, with no room for power sharing can meet the needs of Northern Ireland'. The other main points in this manifesto were the withdrawal of the UK from the EEC and opposition to the liberalisation of legislation on gay rights and prostitution.

And it was this manifesto which won for Paisley his increased support among the Protestant working class.

The dominance of the issues raised in the general election continued afterwards. There developed a mad scramble between the DUP and OUP for who could appear most 'security' minded; who best represented the traditional loyalist values.

Thus during the 1979 12 July celebrations James Molyneaux, now leader of the OUP challenged Paisley on security. The DUP leader had argued that in order for the RUC and British Army to gain acceptance, any member of the security forces who broke the rules under which they were meant to operate should be liable for prosecution. Molyneaux attacked such notions with gusto:

> 'Of course there will be mistakes and in a war there will always be casualities. But those who face the full threat of IRA aggression are not likely to have their resolve strengthened by the sound of Loyalist voices clamouring for their prosecution before the courts.' (*Irish Times* 13/7/79)

The same day Paisley, preferred to stake his claim to traditional loyalist values by saying that Catholic priests were 'deep in active service' with the IRA (*Irish Times* 13/7/79) Not to be outdone Enoch Powell of the OUP reacted to the Mountbatton assassination by saying that Catholic cardinals – as well as the Protestant Archbishop of Canturbury 'aided and encouraged' the IRA (*Irish Times* 27/9/79).

The OUP further sought to outdo Paisley on the security issue when in October 1979 local councils which they controlled passed a resolution calling for 'hot pursuit' over the North/South border and the imposition of curfews in Catholic areas of the North.

The whole contest reached its height with the initiation of the government's constitutional conference at the end of 1979. In the manoeuvring which went on before and after that conference the DUP and OUP entered into a fierce polemic as to who was best serving Loyalists' interests – the OUP by boycotting or the DUP by attending. Molyneux gave as his reason for staying away the refusal of the British Government to launch a new security initiative, and by saying that the 'whole object' of the talks was to 'devise a mechanism to shift Northern Ireland just one step out of the UK and turn it into an all-Ireland Republic' (quoted in *Socialist Challenge*, issue 129). Paisley maintained that he had only agreed to attend the talks because of an assurance he had received from Margaret Thatcher on security after a private meeting with her. Said Paisley, 'Mrs Thatcher is the only Prime Minister who has said to me that the way to defeat the IRA is through military defeat'(*Socialist Challenge* 124).

## Terrain

The point about this 'debate' is the terrain on which it was waged. Not jobs, not wages, not any economic or social issues but on defence of the union, security, and occasionally anti-Catholic bigotry. Of course it could be said that all this was an organised conspiracy to hide from the Protestant working class the 'real issues'; that it was an attempt to blindfold them from what really concerned them. The truth is that politicians in the North of Ireland, like bourgeois politicans everywhere, seek to emphasise what they think will win them votes as long as those issues do not threaten the interests of the bourgeoisie. The stress on security and allied matters reflected not so much on the obsessions of Paisley or Molyneaux but those of the audience to which they were appealing.

That applied not just to the most recent periods. The rise of Paisley and the fall of the OUP over the last ten years were not because of bad toilet facilities. It was because of the concessions the Official Unionist were perceived to have made towards the Catholic minority in the North and because of the inability of the Official Unionists, when they were in government, to put down the 'rebellion'. The emergence of the Ulster Defence Association, the Ulster Volunteer Force and similar organisations was not because the Protestant working class realised the necessity to organise themselves independently of the bourgeoisie, it was because those organisations by their assassination campaigns and similar activities offered to 'deal with' the rebels in a way in which the government appeared incapable of doing.

Such attitudes were most obviously present in the Ulster Workers Council Strike of 1974. A general strike initiated in the main by Protestant industrial trade unionists, but a strike not over wages or jobs but against the idea of Catholics having any share in power, or the North of Ireland being in any way linked – even in the most symbolic – sense to the rest of Ireland: a strike for the traditional loyalist ideology.

All of which is hardly new in the history of the Northern state; the primacy of the issue of defence of the union has always been there. One historical example, that of the 1938 Northern Irish parliamentary election can illustrate the general point being made about Protestant working class consciousness.

In that election the (Official) Unionist Party faced their most widespread challenge to date from within the loyalist camp. The main opponent was the Progressive Unionist Party who contested ten seats on what today some would describe as 'class issues'. When the Unionist Party accused the PUP leader, W J Stewart of splitting the Protestant vote and of possibly letting in anti-partition candidates Stewart replied:

'Partition as an election cry has no value because all Unionists are firmly opposed to any attempt to interfere with the province as an integral part of the United Kingdom . . . We will fight the election on the question of unemployment.' (Bell, 1976, pages 69-70).

Unfortunately for Stewart partition proved a very loud election cry indeed. In all ten constituencies in which PUP stood they were defeated. And this is worth remembering at a time when the economic and social conditions were so bad that unemployment would indeed have seemed to be a good issue to go in on.

The failure of the PUP and the contemporary success of the DUP may, at first glance appear contradictory. In fact the same explanation can be applied to both one's failure and the other's success. Stewart failed because he did not make partition the main issue, Paisley has succeeded because he has been seen to be the most uncompromising on the issue. In both cases Stewart's emphasis on unemployment, Paisley s occasional flirtations with populism were marginal to their success or failure. The union was, and is the issue.

Or at least it is the issue for the Protestant working class. The trend which that class has detected in establishment Unionism – that of not being totally uncompromising in the traditional values – is not something that has been only imagined. Right from Terence O'Neill's talks with Sean Lemass in the mid 1960's through the Unionist Party's support for power-sharing and a Council of Ireland in 1975 the party has hinted that its stress on 'a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people' (in the words of a former Unionist PM) is not what it once was.

Even today with all the electioneering talk and post-election talk about 'security' the Official Unionists continue to tamper with the old articles of loyalist faith.

For instance there is the OUP's main resolution adopted at the 1979 conference. There was no demand for a return to the old Northern Ireland parliament, or indeed for a devolved parliament of any description. Instead:

'Believing as Unionists that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom, we would urge conference to adopt the policy that would result in Northern Ireland receiving the same rights and conditions that prevail elsewhere in the Kingdom' (*Irish Times* 22/8/79).

This meant a call for the complete integration of the Six Counties into the UK. As a policy this is again at variance with that of the DUP. While its submission to the constitutional conference regretfully admitted that a return to the exact state structure that prevailed during the old Stormont parliament was 'unattainable', it did demand a devolved parliament of some kind. Of some power too, for, 'any new administration should be seen as having some sway and role in security matters'(*Irish Times* 9/1/80).

It is worth recording that once again there is no breaking of fresh ground in the Protestant bourgeoisie's ambivalence over the permanence of a separate parliament for the Six Counties, or the issue of relations with the South of Ireland. The upper class leadership of the loyalist resistance to Irish home rule from 1912-21 was never particularly favourable to the idea of a separate Northern Irish parliament. It was accepted in the end as the best it could get. And, once partition had been won as the historian George Dangerfield records, 'Early in 1922, the Belfast business leaders were all in favour of coming to terms with the South'.(Dangerfield, 1979, p.348).

When the Northern parliament was established the vast majority of Northern Protestants grew not only to accept it but to defend it. But this was because, *de facto*, it had in itself become the guarantee of the union with Britain, and the guarantee against Irish self-determination. It became useful too for the Unionist bourgeoisie because it assured them complete control through the state institutions it threw up – the police, the civil service and so on – from which the Unionists could exclude any representative of the Catholic minority who might challenge their ascendency.

But while the North of Ireland parliament proved useful for the bourgeoisie it never has been regarded as a timeless principle to defend. Today, with the instability that the consequences of the old arrangements have so patently produced it is hardly surprising that the Unionist bourgeoisie is looking for other solutions. And integration may be seen to offer a permanence which the previous constitutional arrangements did not.

But for the Protestant working class it is not that simple. For them the precise structures established in 1921 serve a real and material purpose. They have guaranteed a system of preferential treatment over Catholic workers in terms of employment, houses and better paid jobs. Certainly, integration with Britain and the abandonment of the state structures established in 1921 would not change that overnight; indeed it would not change it for rather a long time. But the point remains that unlike the bourgeoisie the Protestant working class have a real material interest in ensuring the 'Protestant Parliament for the Protestant People'. Just how much so was illustrated in a report from the Government sponsored Fair Employment Agency issued in 1978 which concluded that there was two and a half times as many Catholics who were unemployed as there were Protestants and that as far as the working class were concerned, 'the model Protestant male is a skilled worker, whereas the model Roman Catholic is unskilled' (*Irish Times* 12/1/78).

A later report, issued by the same body in early 1980 concluded that in the last generation 'Catholics have tended to move down the social scale more commonly than Protestants' and that 'the proportion of Catholics in lower status jobs could increase in the next decade' (*Irish Times* 17/1/80).

This latter observation is particularly relevant in regards to an expectation commonly voiced that the present economic crisis, and the expected deepening of in the next few years will open to eyes of Protestant workers to the splendours of a socialist solution and class unity. On the contrary the historical evidence – notably the 1930's suggest the reverse – the economic depression increases sectarianism, and that in any depression Catholics invariably suffer worse.

The contemporary example of the Belfast shipbuilding industry can be cited. Catholics have always found employment in the yards difficult to obtain but in the early 1960's there was, it has been estimated 2,000 employed at Harland and Wolff; today it is reckoned there are 400, a decline way out of proportion to the total job loss (*Irish Times* 10/1/80). There is the additional factor that because Protestant workers tend to be skilled in comparison to unskilled Catholics, Protestants have a better chance of finding re-employment than Catholics. To emphasise, what evidence there is suggests that in an economic recession the proportionate differences between Catholic and Protestant workers increase; the notion of a 'common suffering' is a myth.

## Common identity

Which is one, although not the only reason why the sense of a common identity has always been lacking among the working class of the North of Ireland. It is all very well to preach the virtues of a shared class interest between Protestant and Catholic workers: the difficulty is that two 'class interests' have operated – the interests of the Protestant working class and the interests of the Catholic working class. Thus on a simple issue like housing or on unemployment the talk of workers' unity is by and large a mirage. The example of the early civil rights movement illustrated this graphically. This movement, supported by the overwhelming sections of the Catholic working class was in many ways a social movement in that it concentrated on social reforms – fair shares in housing allocation, voting, employment.

That movement was opposed most fervently by the Protestant working class and petty bourgeoisie because the demands the civil rights movement was making cut against their material interests. An end to discrimination meant an end to Protestant (including Protestant working class) privileges.

Which is not to say that the consciousness of the Protestant working class is solely determined by the marginal material privileges they enjoy. There are a whole series of ideological and cultural factors at work. The point is that to separate, in the traditional good old British democratic manner, the 'trade

union' or 'economic' questions from the 'political' questions is even more impractical in the North of Ireland than it is elsewhere. Because the 'economic' questions – jobs, houses, wage rates are intimately bound up, and inseparable from the big 'political' question – the existence of partition and the Northern state. For, it is that state and the structures which it has thrown up that are the most obvious determinates of how houses are allocated, who gets the jobs that are going and who gets the higher wages.

At the start of the civil rights movement the extreme loyalists alleged that the civil rights movement was a republican plot. Which was not exactly the case, but certainly the demands of that movement threatened the state because that state and the sectarianism it has produced are so related that it is impossible to imagine one without the other. Perhaps the loyalist opponents of the early civil rights movement realised that before anyone else.

But, could it not be argued that if the British Labour Party organised in the North of Ireland, then, sectarianism could be challenged by that party? Considering the history of the last Labour Government and its North of Ireland policy such an expectation is rather a small pie in a large sky, but even if the Labour Party desired to make such a challenge – how would it do so? How would it both win Protestant and Catholic workers to its cause? The question is rhetorical: despite all the searching, no cause in the last ten years and in the last sixty years has proved capable of even hinting at the forging of a sustainable common political identity.

The position of the CLR and of those in the Militant and Communist Party who share similar economistic errors is, in its most profound sense nothing to do with trade union unity or the electoral possibilities of the British Labour Party. It is to do with different concepts of democracy implicit in the following question asked by the chairman of the CLR in his letter to *Tribune*: 'Why should we in Northern Ireland not be allowed to vote a Labour Government?'

To support the British Labour Party standing in Northern Ireland is to accept the legitimacy of the Northern Ireland state. In that sense the Labour Party has nothing to offer the people of Northern Ireland except blood, sweat, tears and Unionism.

Perhaps it would, if nothing else, heighten the comedy if we were faced with yet another Unionist Party standing in the North of Ireland this time under the banner of British social democracy. In no way however would this be bringing 'class issues' to Northern Irish politics. The first class issue in the North of Ireland is the right of Irish self-determination. All other questions are peripheral and any who get that first question wrong, whatever their attitude to the others crosses class line.

Which is what the Protestant working class has done. Today those workers are as sectarian and as bigoted as they have ever been in their history. Paisley's 170,000 votes showed that. They are so because they know the threat to the North of Ireland state they have relied on for so long is greater than it has ever been. That state has chained the Protestant working class to one of the most reactionary ideologies in Western Europe. The last ten years has done no more than underline the message of the last sixty – there is no way the chains will be broken, until the state itself is broken.

**Geoff Bell**

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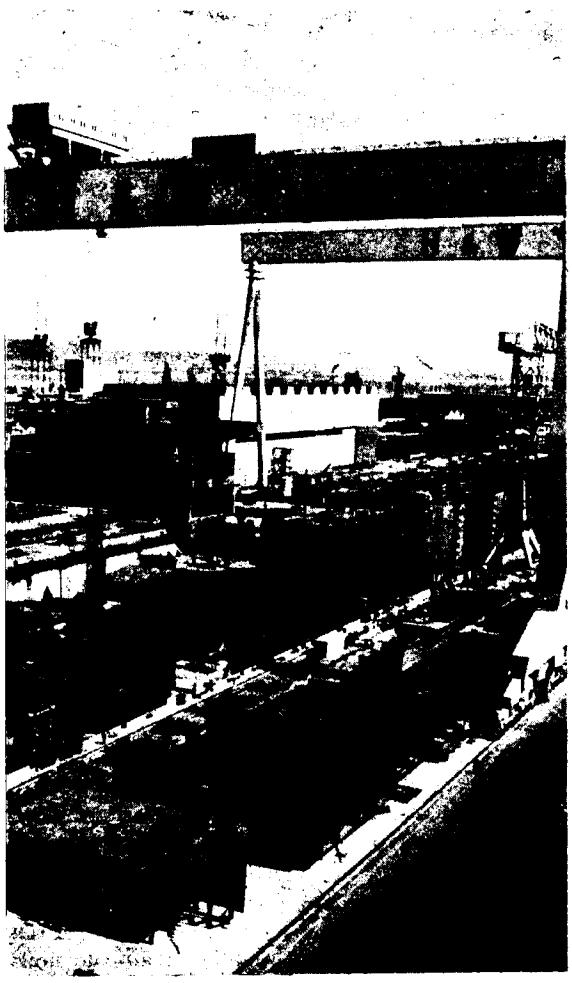


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# Belfast Labourism, 1905-1925

Bob Purdie

*'There's many a victory decisive and complete,*
*Has meant a sight less fighting than a hardly fought defeat;*
*And if people do their duty, every man in his degree,*
*Why, defeat may be more glorious than a victory needs to be.'*
(Quoted in the *Belfast Labour Chronicle*, February 1905)

## Introduction[1]

A recent issue of *Ireland Socialist Review* (*ISR* No. 3) re-published the British Labour Party's 1920 report on the situation in Ireland. The accompanying comment suggested that the politics of British labourism on the Irish question were more complex than previous analyses had allowed for. Similarly this article will attempt to trace the main themes of Labourism in Belfast during the first quarter of this century, demonstrating the internal development which took place within it, when confronted by the Irish national struggle of those years, and the limitations of that development. Here too, it will be suggested, some previous analyses have been oversimplistic.

The conflict in Northern Ireland over the last ten years has stimulated interest in the background to the partition of Ireland and in the social and political forces involved in the creation of the two Irish states. Since the labour movement in Northern Ireland has not played any very dramatic part in events, it has been neglected; this is unfortunate, since it not only underestimates the influence exerted in the background by that movement today, but it also ignores the fact that labour has played an important, if episodic, part in the politics of twentieth century Belfast.

## Belfast Labour

A branch of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was founded in Belfast in 1893, encouraged by the British TUC, which met in the town that year. In 1905 a Labour Representation Committee (LRC) was formed, which later was merged with the Trades Council. In effect the Trades Council, the LRC, the ILP, the Belfast Socialist Society, and the Belfast Labour Party, were composed of an interlocking group of activists who will be referred to here as 'Belfast Labour'.[2] After some years of difficult struggles Belfast Labour began to make some progress in the first decade of this century. In 1905 and 1906 their candidate, William Walker, fought the North Belfast division, and was defeated by only 500 votes on the first occasion and 291 on the second. A third contest in 1907 resulted in a more decisive defeat. Despite its failures at Parliamentary elections Belfast Labour succeeded in various municipal, aldermanic and Poor Law elections, and maintained a steady ten per cent of the seats on Belfast Corporation between 1897 and 1919.

However Belfast Labour proved to be extremely susceptible to the violent fluctuations of Irish politics. Its main successes were won at times when the constitutional future of Ireland was not a prominent issue. In the 1911-14 period when the anti-Home Rule agitation was at its height, Labour experienced some difficulties, as a report in the Glasgow Socialist paper, *Forward* (11.1.13), indicated:

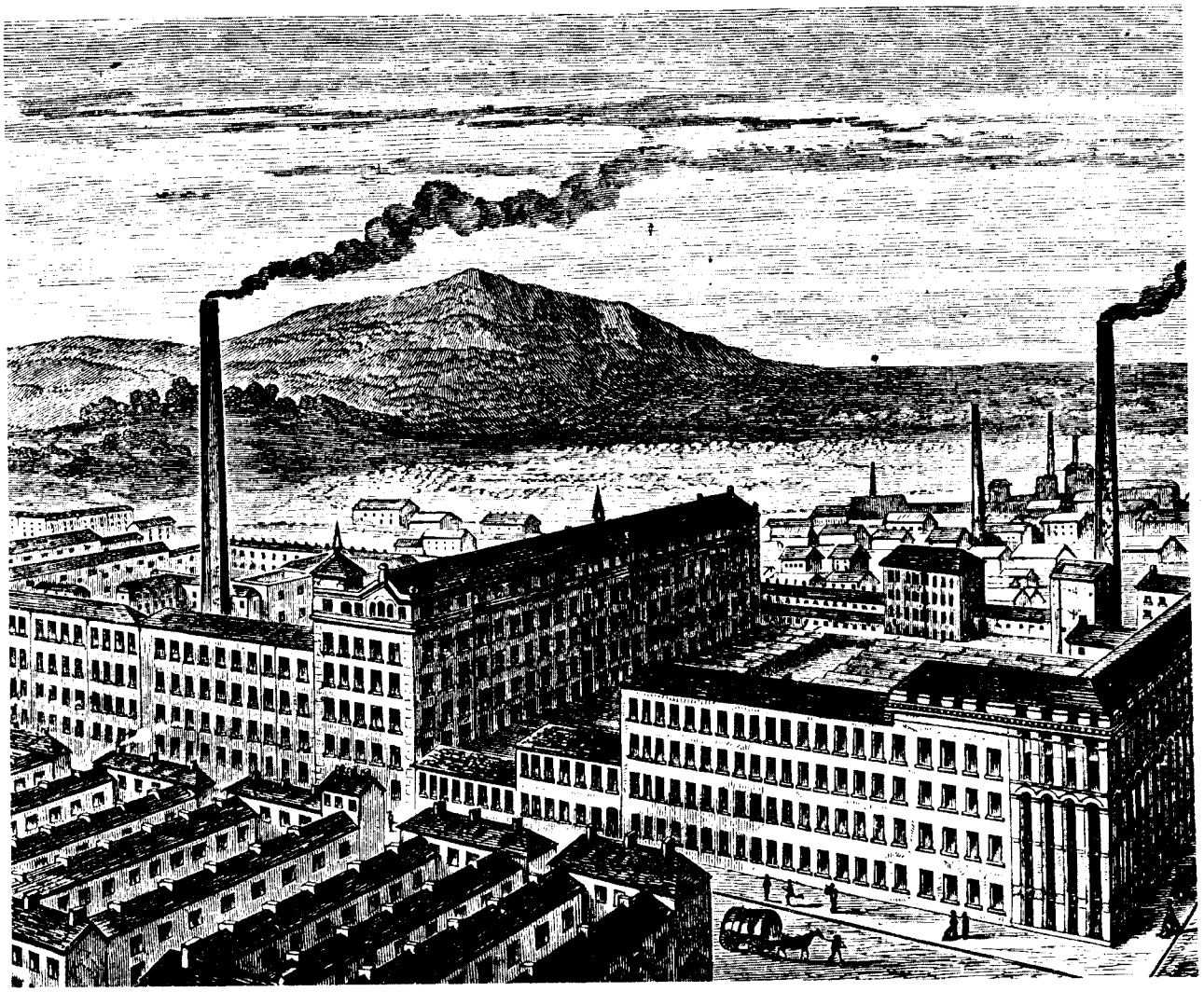
'The North Belfast branch of the ILP is at present passing through troubled waters. Many of their most prominent workers who found their daily employment at the shipyards have had to leave the city and find their bread in other and more tolerant quarters.'

During the First World War sectarian tensions faded, and Belfast was quiet during most of the Irish war of independence, which barely affected the North; Belfast Labour was able to recover its position. In March 1919 the British House of Commons legislated for a system of proportional representation in Irish local elections, and this aided Labour to win ten seats on the Corporation. Labour's success was of material importance for the future Northern Ireland state – the Unionists' decision to accept the exclusion of only six counties from Home Rule, rather than the nine counties of Ulster, was probably influenced by it. They would have had only a precarious majority in the nine counties, and at the Ulster Unionist Council meeting at which the decision was taken a delegate pointed out that the growth of the Labour vote in the Belfast area could reduce their overall majority in a parliament based on nine counties to two seats (Buckland 1973 p. 403).

It is important to note that this Labour advance was achieved at a time of deep industrial unrest. The 40 hours strike on Clydeside had sparked off a similar movement in Belfast, and this indicated that wages and conditions were taking precedence over constitutional questions in the minds of Belfast workers. The 1919 strike recalled the events of 1907, when the fiery Labour leader, James Larkin, led a virtual general strike. So intense was the class feeling amongst Belfast workers that a section of the Orange movement backed the strikers, and the hard pressed and underpaid police joined in. However the police mutiny, in bringing matters to a crisis point, revealed the weakness of the unity. The intervention of the British Army provoked a Catholic riot, reopened the sectarian divisions, and defeated the strike.

In a similar way the 1919 strike was followed by a renewed period of sectarianism. In the spring of 1920 IRA operations spread to the North for the first time, and Protestant paramilitary forces were mobilised. By the autumn Belfast was gripped by a serious sectarian outbreak, and thousands of Catholics were being forced out of their homes and jobs.[3] The focal point of this outbreak was the shipyards, and leading members of the ILP and Trades Council were also expelled, as suspected 'disloyalists'.

It is hardly surprising that, in this atmosphere, the Labour movement in Belfast made little progress. During the first Northern Ireland general election, in 1921, the Ulster Hall was booked for a Labour rally, but on the previous night a mass demonstration of shipyard workers occupied it to prevent the 'Bolsheviks' holding their meeting. A telegram from the Unionist leader, Craig, said '. . . well done big and wee yards.'[4](Farrell 1976, p.37) The atmosphere of the



Belfast linen factory

election campaign is conveyed by the report of a speech made by one Labour candidate at the count:

> 'During the election he had not been allowed to say a word. . . . he had been hunted and shadowed by Crown forces and he was unable to conduct his campaign. Intimidation reached the polling and many seeking to vote were brutally assaulted. He had been threatened . . . Your election . . . has been carried out under the worst intimidation and marked by wholesale impersonation.' (ibid.)

However as time passed, and the violence subsided, the state returned to something resembling normality. In 1925, encouraged by the success of the British Labour Party in forming a Government, Belfast Labour won four seats in the Northern Ireland House of Commons. But the Unionists subsequently pushed through the abolition of Proportional Representation and Labour fortunes slumped again, not to recover until 1958, when it again won four seats. During the conflict of the last ten years the Northern Ireland Labour Party has been all but eliminated as an electoral force.

This brief summary indicates that Belfast Labour has operated under conditions significantly less favourable than those enjoyed by the British Labour Party – conditions which were even less favourable than those obtaining in the South of Ireland, where the Labour Party has been able to carve out a minor, but stable position for itself in Irish politics.[5]

Belfast, it must be stressed, is unique;[6] the only city in Ireland which shared in the development of British heavy industry, it nevertheless was subjected to the vicissitudes of the Irish national question, which helped to create a city deeply divided in religion and politics. As industry developed in Belfast, and labour flooded in from the surrounding countryside, the bitter sectarian divisions which had survived in rural areas between the descendants of the Protestant settlers and the Catholic native Irish, were imported. Sectarianism became woven into the social fabric of the city, determining the distribution of employment, the geographical distribution of the population, and political loyalties. Belfast Labour failed to rise above these sectarian divisions, and to become the political expression of the majority of the working class.

## Walkerism

One of the reasons for the neglect of Belfast Labour is the fact that Irish Labour historiography is dominated by the figure of James Connolly. The contribution made by Connolly to the Irish Labour movement was extremely important, but was concentrated into two fairly brief periods. A historiography which views the development of the Irish Labour Movement through his eyes will, inevitably, be somewhat fragmented. And since, for most of this time, Connolly's politics were quite untypical of the mainstream of Irish Labour, it will be subject to distortions of perspective. One example of this is the treatment given to the Belfast Labour leader, William Walker, in a recent book by Geoff Bell (1976), which claims that Walker was: '. . . leading socialism in Belfast along a religiously sectarian path . . .' (p.74) This is a serious misinterpretation of Walker, and of Belfast Labour. However much socialists today may disagree

with Walker's strategy and tactics, we ought to try to grasp the logic of his politics. As will be shown, this cannot be dismissed as simple 'sectarianism'.

William Walker has become best known for his debate with Connolly over the formation of an Irish Labour Party. This was carried in the pages of *Forward* between May and July 1911, and generated more heat than light, but Walker's contributions give some interesting insights into his politics.[7] C.Desmond Greaves does not deal adequately with it when he says:

> 'His (Walker's) conception of politics was completely reformist. He pointed with pride to the progress of "municipal socialism" in Belfast. Did they not "collectively own and control" gasworks, waterworks, harbour works, markets, tramways, electricity, museums and art galleries? They had even organised a police band. Walker saw no more to socialism than an extension of these things.' (p.210)

**'Belfast Labour failed to rise above these sectarian divisions, and to become the political expression of the majority of the working class.'**

This is true enough, but it does not get to the core of the differences; an Irish Labour Party was as capable of pursuing municipalisation as an Irish branch of the British LP, which Walker supported against Connolly's proposal for a united party on an all-Ireland basis. In any case Connolly himself advocated the extension of municipal ownership when he stood for Belfast Corporation in January 1913. (Connolly 1951, pp.99-102). The clue to Walker's outlook is to be found in the penultimate paragraph of his last contribution to the debate:

> '. . . only a combined and united attack, without geographical consideration, can assure to Ireland an equal measure of social advancement as that which the larger and more advanced democracy of Great Britain are pressing for.' (Connolly/Walker p.27)

Connolly saw the Union between Ireland and Britain as a barrier to progress, for the Labour Movement as much as for the nationalist movement. Walker on the other hand, saw progress being won for the Irish working class, through its association with the British working class, and under his influence, the ideology of Belfast Labour was an extension into Ireland of British Labourism.

By 'British Labourism' is meant the ideas which were current in the formative years of the modern British labour movement, especially those which were influential in the ILP. It is useful, here, to quote from one of the most popular pamphlets of the period, Robert Blatchford's *Britain for the British*:

> 'The kind of *Socialism* I am advocating here is Collectivism or *Practical Socialism*. Motto: Britain for the British, the land and all the instruments of production, distribution and exchange to be the property of the nation, and to be managed by the nation for the nation.' (p.89)
>
> '. . . Collectivism is really an extension of the *principles*, or ideas of local government, and of the various corporations and civil services.' (ibid.)
>
> '. . . what is there in it (socialism) to prevent any man from being a Christian, or from attending a place of worship, or from marrying or being faithful to his wife, or from keeping and bringing up his children at home?' (ibid.)

Essentially the same tone was struck by a leaflet issued by the Belfast Socialist Society:[8]

> 'In the same way as the Post Office, the Gas Supply, the Tramways undertaking and many other public services have been transferred from private to public ownership, so can the land, the Railways, Canals and Shipping, the Coal, Milk and Bread Supply, etc. etc., be taken over by the community as the occasion demands.
>
> '*We do not* want to "destroy the foundations of morality". We desire to introduce a higher morality into the industrial life of the nation.
>
> '*We do not* want to "promote a violent revolution". We wish to see a higher social order peacefully evolved out of the present anarchical system by peaceful means.'

The belief that an extension of public ownership and democratic control was sufficient to cure society's ills was allied to a chiliasm of peculiar moral fervour, which gave both a driving force and an immediate programme to the socialist movement in the early years of this century. Belfast Labour shared all of these characteristics, along with the conviction of the British movement that all other political prescriptions, Free Trade, Protectionism, Nationalism etc., were irrelevant or misleading.

Belfast Labour, however, had some important individual characteristics. Because of the structure of employment in Belfast, which meant that skilled trades were virtually excluded to Catholics, the labour movement in the city was dominated by Protestants. This domination was strengthened by the discouragement by the Church of Catholic involvement in socialist politics. Coming from a culture that regarded itself as British, it was natural that Belfast Labour should take its lead from the British labour movement. This is not to say that their colleagues in the South were not also influenced by the British labour movement, but their attitudes to Irish nationality and the constitutional future of Ireland placed them at a greater distance. So far as Belfast Labour was concerned nationalism was a diversion, the July 1905 edition of their newspaper, the *Belfast Labour Chronicle*, summed up their attitude:

> 'Class ties are stronger than those of race, and the workers of all lands and climes have a common class interest. They are all units of the army of labour, and they ought, therefore to forget their differences of race, language and colour and stand shoulder to shoulder in order to withstand the attack of the common foe – capitalism.'

In October the same year the *Chronicle* confronted the question of Home Rule:

> 'Nationalism is dead or dying, and imperialism is but the transition stage to international union of the proletariat of the world over . . . Even the total separation of Ireland would be but a disintegrating influence on the people, and can proceed from narrow views alone, and . . . the real object of all honest believers in Home Rule would leave Ireland more the prey of tyranny and oppression than ever.' (7.10.05)

This belief that the centralising tendencies of industrial capitalism and imperialist expansion were a force for progress was returned to in a comment on the growth of the Irish language movement:

> '. . . the number of Welsh speakers is declining each year, and it is a decided advantage to the Welsh people, who are more progressive than ever before in their modern history . . . anything which tends to divide the people into separate and opposing factors is evil, and all which tends to unification is useful and desireable. Not the multiplication of spoken tongues, but their absorption into one universal medium of thought . . . will benefit the people of this world.' (14.10.05)

Not only Irish nationalism came in for criticism however, the *Chronicle* also denounced the behaviour of the English populace on Mafeking night as 'mad blackguardism'(July 1905). Despite these internationalist declarations, however, they gave many indications of their own background. The *Chronicle* of 14 October 1905 praised the 'tactfulness' of King Edward in agreeing to receive an address from Poplar Borough Council; the editorial of 7 October 1905 assumed that Irish independence meant '. . . handing Ireland over to the domination of the priesthood . . .' , and at a social following one of Walker's election campaigns the proceedings were closed with the singing of the (British) National Anthem.[9] Small points, but in the atmosphere of Belfast sufficient to make any Labour supporter from a Catholic background feel in an alien environment.

Whatever may have been their convictions, their opposition to Irish nationalism cannot be seen as simple internationalism. James Connolly accused Belfast Labour of 'parochialism', and there is much truth in this. They, undoubtedly, felt the pressure of the protestant community very strongly, and especially that of the shipyard workers, the strongest centre

of Trade Unionism in the city. Peter Gibbon (1975) analyses the politics of the shipyard workers thus:

> 'The shipyard was a bulwark of British imperialist might . . . Fluctuations in imperial prosperity were registered more clearly and directly in the shipbuilding than in almost any other industry. Consequently the livelihood of shipyard workers was tied not simply to the more or less autonomous fluctuations of particular trades, but to the state of British capitalism *internationally*. . . . In this fasion shipyard men became attuned to questions of national politics . . . .' (p.84)

Their economic interest in the expansion of British power, combined with the traditions of Orangeism to produce a strong Conservative and Unionist consciousness amongst skilled shipbuilding and engineering workers in Belfast. This did not necessarily mean a rejection of Trade Unionism, on the contrary, many fervent Unionists were active Trade Unionists. Joseph Cunningham, later to become a Unionist Senator, was a member of the Belfast 7th branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, and secretary of the District Committee, he was sent as a delegate to a number of conferences, and chaired a conference called by the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions in the Ulster Hall, to discuss a shorter working week. For all this Trade Union activity he was a strong Orangeman and was Worshipful Master of his Lodge. During the anti-Home Rule agitation he was involved in lobbying British trade unionists in an attempt to persuade them against it. An indication of the outlook of such men is contained in the account of a meeting with Sir Edward Carson to discuss the acceptance of the exclusion of the six counties:

> 'I was the first speaker to follow him stating that it would prove successful as we have a very intelligent and industrious people in Northern Ireland but I was afraid we would be swamped by the influx of Southerners to take advantage of our prosperity.'

For skilled workers like Cunningham the maintenance and advancement of their standard of living was closely connected to the prosperity of British industry, and was woven in a seamless web with Orange traditions or anti-Catholicism and hostility to Irish nationalism.[10] At specific moments of crisis this outlook could break down, precipitating Protestant workers into militant struggles against their Unionist masters, but these occasions were few and far between, and the consciousness of such workers constituted the dimensions of the universe in which Belfast Labour had its being.

Amongst less skilled Protestant workers there was a strong sense of territorial community that frequently found expression in clashes with Catholics over encroachments, and this gave a violent edge to life in Belfast. When this was combined with the influence of fundamentalist evangelism which was popular in the city the result could be a dauntingly militant intolerance. The *Clarion* of 11 May 1895 described an early ILP meeting at which socialist speakers were assaulted by a mob which fervently sang *Rule Britannia* and *God Save the Queen*, and:

> 'Organised and premeditated murder surrounded us on all sides . . . the dogs of war broke loose with a yell that rent the firmament and with clenched fists, fuming and trampling down everything the yelling demons leapt upon us.' (Quoted in Patterson 1976 p.32)

Although the Belfast ILP showed great courage in standing up to intimidation, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the social pressures of the Protestant community found expression in their attitudes to Irish nationalism, and this was strengthened by the fact that they found in British Labourism a tradition of mechanical dismissal of nationalism as an irrelevance, and an assumption that British expansion was a basis for internationalism, which accorded with their own outlook.

## Pluralism

We cannot, however, dismiss Belfast Labour as a sort of 'Orange Socialism', their politics were much more complex than that. A deeper insight is provided by the address delivered by William Walker in his capacity as President, to the Irish Trades Union Congress in Kilkenny, May 1904. This is particularly relevant since it must be borne in mind that another dimension of Belfast Labour was its participation in the *Irish* labour movement. Walker began by reviewing the state of trade unionism, and pointed out that the 'Magna Charta' granted to them in the Trade Union and Conspiracy Acts of 1871 and 1875 were being undermined by decisions of the courts. Increasingly they had to face trusts and combines rather than individual employers, and their representatives were not adequately educated. The workers had to return to the kind of constitutional agitation which had won them legislative concessions in the past; this required unity and a concentration on immediate issues, but they had been '. . . victims of the unredeemed pledges of the various political parties . . .', this meant that:

> 'The housing of the working classes, amendments to the Workmen's Compensation Act, amendments to the Factories Act, the fixing of standard hours of employment, the improving of the condition of the rural labourer, and the many other necessary improvements can only be sympathetically grasped by a strong and vigorous Labour Party.' (Walker 1904, p.5)

The developing movement for Labour representation in Britain presented a challenge to Irish Labour:

> 'No country in the world requires so much the care and attention to social wants that Ireland demands at the hands of her representatives. [But] . . . The keen party political warfare that she is continually plunged in prevents even moderate attention being paid to her industrial conditions.' (p.7)

He appealed for a new initiative on the part of Irish Labour: 'I conjure each delegate to emancipate himself from the old atmosphere by which he has been surrounded and to step into that purer air that bespeaks . . . a regenerated and ennobling life.' (p.8)

After dealing with the proposals of Joseph Chamberlain for protective tariffs[11] and the introduction of indentured Chinese labour into the Rand, Walker sat down to an enthusiastic ovation, having delivered a speech which in most essentials could have been delivered by any British Trade Union leader.[12] However at a number of points Walker reveals that he is sensitive to the fact that he is speaking to an Irish audience: 'hear hears' greeted his statement that 'No power was ever yet able to withstand a nation's united desire.' (p.4), although he did not say which nation he was referring to. He gave equal emphasis to the deleterious effects of protection on Southern agriculture as on Northern shipbuilding. Towards the end of his address he confronted Irish problems more squarely:

> 'How long are we going to perpetuate this internecine warfare that has strangled at birth every new hope and every ideal making for progress in Ireland. Surely a mature consideration will show us, no matter what political or religious positions we may hold, that there are some questions on which we cannot hope to unite, but is that a reason why those hundred and one other problems, the solving of which means so much for our country, should be indefinitely shelved . . . is it not possible for us to adhere to our opinions . . . while at the same time we determine to unite our forces for the social redemption of our country. If we care to we can bridge the chasm that separates the North from the South.'(p.12)

The idea that Irish Labour could maintain a pluralist unity between opponents and supporters of Home Rule was an interesting one, but Walker did not develop it beyond the level of rhetoric, quoting Ruskin to the effect that he was prepared to tolerate everything but another man's intolerance.[13](A quotation he also used in his polemic with Connolly).

Walker's ideas can be compared with ideas current in the British Labour Movement, for example, in his address to the 1910 ILP conference W.F.Jowett said:

> 'Hitherto it has been the fate of working class movements in this country to find no common denominator on which to unite. Every faction has insisted on pressing its opinions on the rest at the point of the bayonet of disruption.'

Nevertheless:

> 'I have faith that by means of patient and persevering methods we shall fuse and weld together an alert and vigorous party for Labour and Socialism . . . I believe that this party . . . at present but an alliance between bodies

at various stages of political development, will grow in numbers and in influence in our day, until it changes the whole course of politics and gives dignity and independence to the working man and heads his straight for Socialism.' (*Conference Report* p.35)

The ILP strongly believed that, as the Labour Movement grew in strength and influence, it would undergo a qualitative change into a strongly united Socialist movement. It was this which justified Socialist participation in a Labour electoral alliance which was not itself Socialist. Socialism was the inevitable outcome of capitalist evolution, and Socialists could afford to be patient until the trend of development was evident to the movement as a whole. In a similar way Walker preached co-existence with Nationalist and Unionist trade unionists until Irish Labour caught up with the trend of history. Their expectations are revealed by an exchange which took place at a Trades Council meeting in September 1908: at which Walker said:

'The East (Belfast) was the biggest division in Ireland, and from a Trade Union and Labour standpoint it should be the best. They had there all the elements that should go to make up a proper Labour constituency.

'Mr. Murphy – "including the big drums", (laughter).[14]

'Mr. Walker said that the East had not a monopoly of big drums, and some of that party might be found voting for the Labour candidate . . . the presence of a Labour candidate would have a stimulating effect on the workers and unify their actions.' (*Northern Whig* 21.9.09)

## Electoralism

However Belfast electoral politics were full of hidden shoals and reefs, as Walker found out in his first contest, during which he became involved in an incident which seems to have contradicted the principles he had previously set out. In September 1905 he challenged the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Sir Daniel Dixon, at a bye-election in North Belfast. During the campaign a group called the Belfast Protestant Association (BPA) presented Walker with a questionnaire about his views on the constitutional status of Protestantism. Walker committed himself to opposing the opening of the offices of Lord Chancellor of England and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to Catholics; to opposing diplomatic links with the Vatican; to retaining the declaration against the doctrine of Transubstantiation in the Monarch's Coronation Oath, and to '. . . resist every encroachment on the legislative enactments provided by our forefathers as necessary safeguards against the encroachments of the Papacy' (Bell 1976, p.74). He further declared that 'Protestantism means protesting against superstition, hence true Protestantism is synonymous with Labour.' (Boyle 1962, p.139).

This was a grave blunder in a constituency which contained 1,000 Catholic votes; Ramsay MacDonald had come over from the Labour Representation Committee to act as Walker's election agent, and almost returned to London forthwith. It is not at all clear why Walker committed himself in this way; he may have conscientiously believed in these policies, or he may simply have been afraid to alienate Protestant votes. Elections in the North of Ireland have always been fought with no holds barred, in fact MacDonald had at one point advocated giving up the fight, and appealing the election in the courts, on the basis that their opponents had grossly contravened the election laws. In the event Dixon refused to answer the BPA, and his supporters printed up Walker's answers on an anonymous leaflet and had them distributed to Catholics. This was a cool piece of opportunism on Dixon's part, considering the fact that the bulk of his campaign had been directed at Walker's association with the LRC, most of whose leaders supported Home Rule. 'Mr. WALKER and his friends,' one of their leaflets said:

'Mr. J. Ramsay MacDonald, Mr. Walker's election agent is an advocate of HOME RULE FOR IRELAND, abolition of the House of Lords, Socialist Programme and PRO-BOER: Electors of North Belfast, Don't be misled by Home Rulers and Socialists.'

A Labour leaflet retorted:

'WHY are so many English workmen HOME RULERS? Is it not because the Ulster Unionist Party Opposes the Shortening of the Hours of Labour. The feeding of Necessitous Children. The Amendment of the Workmen's Compensation Act. The Repeal of the Taff Vale Decisions against Trade Union . . . in fact every Bill making for the betterment of the People. VOTE FOR WALKER AND SHOW THE ENGLISH WORKMEN that besides being UNIONISTS you are also in favour of SOCIAL REFORMS.'

The ease with which attempts to answer his opponent's diversionary tactics could infringe a principled position is illustrated by another leaflet which took up a rumour that Walker was an atheist. This reprinted a reply sent by Walker to a Rev. S. Simms, in which Walker said:

'I can fully appreciate the difficulty you and your ministerial colleagues would be in were it not possible to give an emphatic denial to the report so shamefully circulated by my opponents . . . the report is absolutely without foundation, as I am a BELIEVER in the fundamental principles of the Christian faith.'

Just as he had failed to see the implications of accepting that a lack of religious belief would disqualify a Labour candidate, Walker may not have seen the broader principles involved in his capitulation to the BPA. And within his political tradition there were elements which would justify his action. The belief that socialism involved nothing more than a series of legislative reforms, with no implications for prevailing morals or religious beliefs, meant that accusations that he challenged these morals or beliefs were an irrelevance to be answered by showing that he did not. Similarly accusations that he was soft on Home Rule were irrelevant, and were to be answered by pointing out that he was opposed. Further his pluralist ideas were applied to his relationship to a British Labour Party which supported Home Rule; a leaflet entitled 'DIXON'S RED HERRINGS' pointed out that, 'The English Labour Party has decided to accept Mr. Walker as a Unionist and to respect his principles'.[15]

In January the following year, when Walker again faced Dixon, this time at a general election, he took pains to stress that:

'. . . he was neither a bigoted Protestant nor a Roman Catholic: he was not a man ashamed of his Protestantism, but he was not a bigot, and he wanted to get every man his rights.' (*BLC* 6.1.06)

The importance of those 1,000 Catholic votes was further indicated by the *Chronicle*'s remarks on West Belfast, the constituency with the largest number of Catholics:

'If the Catholic voters can secure one fourth of the representation (from Belfast) – and on their aggregate numbers they are entitled to it, they ought to aim, in our opinion, at having a candidate of Mr. Devlin's stamp, who . . . has all the backbone and independence necessary to prevent his becoming the tool of any party or clique.' (30.12.05)

Labour possibly hoped that by backing Joe Devlin they in turn would be supported by Devlin's organisation, the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), and the main Catholic paper the *Irish News*. This was a significant change in Labour policy. A year earlier, in its February 1905 edition, the *Chronicle* had spoken confidently of the five wards Labour had won in Protestant areas, and predicted that: 'A similar policy in Falls [the main Catholic] ward will have similar results . . .' In June it took a similarly uncompromising line on the candidacy of Thomas H. Sloan, a populist Protestant; before receiving Labour's support a candidate would have to '. . . be the accredited nominee of some bona fide Labour body . . .'. It went on to say that if the projected candidacy of Michael Davitt for West Belfast should materialise, he could no more receive Labour backing than could Sloan. Less than a year later they felt obliged to abandon this position in favour of Devlin, a man, for all his rhetoric, who had infinitely less solid links with the Labour Movement than Davitt had.[16]

Apart from those vital Catholic votes in the North, another factor which probably influenced this switch in policy was the fact that Labour's rise co-incided with that of two parallel popular movements, Devlin's AOH, and the Independent Orange Order, with which Sloan was associated. The AOH was part of the revival of the Home Rule Party under Redmond. It was distinguished from the Catholic Association, which had previously dominated the politics of Catholic Belfast, by its

relative independence from the Church and by Devlin's radicalism. The Independent Orange Order (IOO) started as a breakaway from the main Order, influenced by the Belfast Protestant Association. Its leader, Lindsay Crawford, started out as an extreme Protestant bigot, but after the breach began to evolve rapidly in the direction of radical politics, and ended up as a Liberal Home Ruler. For a time he was able to draw the 100 with him, and in the Magheramore Manifesto of July 1905 it declared that it wished to:

'Hold out the right hand of fellowship to those who, while worshipping at other shrines are still our countrymen – bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.' (Boyle p. 134)

It further departed from Orange doctrine by declaring that:

'There is room in Ireland for a patriotic party with a sound constructive policy that will devote itself to freeing the country from the domination of impracticable creeds and to securing the urgent and legitimate redress of her many grievances.' (ibid. p. 135)

The sense that there was a new departure in Belfast politics, and the affinity between these three movements is conveyed by a report in the *Irish News* of one of Devlin's election meetings:

'Mr. Nanetti[17] said that, like Mr. Devlin he differed from Mr. Sloan on religious and political grounds but . . . Tom Sloan would fight in the House of Commons for their interests and the interests of the working men of Belfast (Applause) . . . If they could not give him a nationalist, at least give him an honest Orangeman who was prepared to work straight for the people. (Cheers) He had worked for years with Mr. Walker – (Cheers) – as a Labour man Walker was a clever intelligent fellow . . . and if the people of North Belfast were wise they would send him to Parliament next session (Cheers). Devlin for the West, Sloan for the South, and Walker for the North. (Renewed cheers) With these three men in Parliament they would not be misrepresented as they had in the past. (Hear, hear and applause).' (15.1.06)

Given the pluralist conceptions of Belfast Labour, and their belief that people with different views on questions of religion and nationalism could collaborate for immediate social reforms, it is not surprising that they should accept a tacit alliance of this kind, even though it contradicted previous statements. But their hopes that social agitation would replace sectarian politics in Belfast were not realised. The three movements reached a peak during the 1907 strike, but with its defeat the old order reasserted itself. They had been going through what was, essentially, an artificial phase of Irish politics, when the Liberal Party had got agreement to shelve Home Rule. Lindsay Crawford soon outran the IOO and was expelled; under the leadership of Sloan it lapsed back into its former bigotry. The continuing animosity of the Belfast Labour Movement to Home Rule prevented any closer association with Devlin's movement, which was in any case fairly demagogic in its radicalism, and was dominated by Catholic small businessmen rather than by workers.

## Partition

Nor were hopes of a growing unity within the Irish Labour Movement realised. The problem was that before Irish Labour could make any significant initiatives in the electoral field it would have to decide whether it was going to set up an Irish Labour Party or an Irish extension of the British Labour Party. Belfast Labour favoured the latter course, radical nationalists in the South favoured the former, and more orthodox nationalists favoured an association with the Irish Party. In 1903 Congress passed a compromise position calling on Irish unions to affiliate to the LRC in Britain as a first step towards securing Labour representation in Ireland, but only Belfast Labour really carried this policy through. At the 1904 Congress Walker urged his colleagues to set about this task, in an atmosphere of fraternal goodwill between North and South; the goodwill was not to last.

A year later the *Chronicle* was complaining about trends in the Irish Labour Movement:

'Year by year the amount of interest which our local Trade Unionists manifest in the annual assembly called the Irish Parliament of Labour becomes beautifully less. . . . This year's Congress has added the finishing touches to what preceding Congresses began, and to all intents and purposes local interest in the Congress and its deliberations is now dead.' (July 1905)

In a report on the Congress, Harry R. Stockman (ILP 1905) complained irritably about the many shortcomings of the 1905 Congress, and at the way in which nationalist sentiments had been introduced where they were not relevant; in discussing the Trades Disputes Bill, for example, fulsome tributes had been made to nationalist MPs who had supported it. The free-trader Stockman was aghast at proposals to restrict imports and the immigration of labour in order to boost industry and employment in Ireland. 'If the Irish Nationalists are to be judged by their actions at Wexford,' he commented, '. . . They are reactionaries of the worst type.' (ibid). There was bitter infighting at the Congress between the Dublin Typographical Association and the Belfast branch of the English Typographical Association, reporting this Stockman's irritation found vent in a phrase which reveals something of the cultural divide between Belfast Labour and their Southern colleagues. 'Delegate after delegate', he said, 'with more brogue than brains, was put up to explain . . . what wicked things the Belfast and English Typographical men had done' (ibid).

As the strength of nationalism within the Southern Movement increased, relations between Belfast and the rest of the Movement deteriorated further. When, in 1912, the Irish Congress decided to set up an Irish Labour Party the Belfast Trades Council disaffiliated. However the Congress's decision was partly a result of changes in the balance of forces within the Congress due to the unionisation of unskilled workers, and in particular the rise of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. Similar changes were taking place in Belfast, so that withdrawal from the Irish Congress did not free Belfast Labour from the same controversy. In addition, despite the Trades Council's repudiation of an Irish Labour Party a number of unions withdrew. This meant that the balance of forces within the Trades Council was changed.

Other factors were dictating a change in the attitudes of Belfast Labour; in the 1911-12 period Home Rule seemed almost a certainty, and James Connolly's call for an Irish Labour Party, which would fight the battles of the workers in the new Dublin parliament, made sense to many Belfast trade unionists. In 1912 Walker was appointed a National Insurance Commissioner and retired from active politics, thus removing from the scene the most capable opponent of an Irish Labour Party. Two of the three Belfast branches of the ILP joined with Connolly's Socialist Party of Ireland, to form the Independent Labour Party of Ireland (ILP[I]), although Walker's North Branch carried on as a branch of the British ILP.[18]

The new atmosphere in Belfast Labour politics was signalled on 21 February, 1914, when the Trades Council passed the following resolution:

'That in view of the probable change in the government of Ireland, in the opinion of the Council the time is now opportune for a conference of Trade Unions, ILP and Co-operative Societies to consider the question of Labour representation in Ireland.'

With the suggestion of the secretary that this initiative should be co-ordinated with the plans of the Irish TUC, the resolution was passed, and one month later the Council re-affiliated to the Irish Congress.

This turn-around is less surprising when it is placed in its political context. The idea of excluding Ulster, or part of Ulster, from the operation of the Home Rule Bill was being floated, and this produced strong opposition from Irish Labour. The Trades Council minutes of 2 April 1914 record a strongly worded resolution from the Congress's Parliamentary Committee:

'. . . the suggested exclusion of Ulster (or any part thereof), will intensify the divisions at present existing, and destroy all our hopes of uniting the workers of Ulster with those of Munster, Leinster and Connaught . . .'

At the Irish Congress of 1914 a Belfast Trades Council delegate explained the attitude of Belfast Labour, the Trades Council had:

'Never voted on Home Rule but had emphatically protested

against Partition . . . The Irish Parliament would not dare to promote labour legislation; they would be told that there must be no interference with labour lest they might frighten off the capitalists of Ulster. Labour in Ulster would be nobody's child; it would be very hard to get Westminster legislation to apply to Ulster.' (Quoted in Clarkson, 1925, p. 299)

This statement reveals how consistent with their previous positions this opposition to Partition was. The central plank of Walker's defence of the Union with Britain was that Irish workers would benefit from the victories of the British working class. Partition would give them the worst of both worlds; not only would they be cut off from the Irish working class, in a way that would sustain sectarian divisions in Belfast, but they would also be cut off from the progress of British Labour. The Trades Council's activity on this question and the fact that it represented only a minority of working class opinion is testified to by Joseph Cunningham, who recalled that:

'The Trades and Labour Council with very little support from the trade unionists, were sending reports across the water that only the employing class were opposed to Home Rule; the workers were not interested.'

Cunningham, however, was exaggerating the lack of support for the Trades Council's line.

In 1917 the position of Belfast Labour seems to have been further developed. *Forward* of 9 June reported that the Belfast ILP had declared in favour of a '. . . broad and comprehensive measure of Self-government for Ireland with no partition.' This must have referred to the North ILP branch, since the ILP (I) had reverted to calling itself the Socialist Party of Ireland. By this time, however, the Labour Movement in the South was strongly influenced by Republicanism, and under pressure from Sinn Fein. In trying to keep pace with developments in nationalist politics they left Belfast behind, and in 1918 Belfast Labour refused to accept the Irish Labour Party's decision to abstain in the General Election to give Sinn Fein a clear run. Two candidates were put up in Belfast whose,

'. . . campaign was on the usual line – shorter working hours, improved factory conditions, concilliation boards, an improved education system – but avoided the issue of Irish self-government.' (Mitchell 1974, p. 101)

With the tide running their way Walker's supporters felt bolder in the local elections of 1920. To Unionist accusations that they represented 'Sinn Fein Trade Unionism' [19] the President of the Belfast Labour Party replied that:

' "Home Rule" . . . held no fears for his party. "We consider that the progress of Ireland is more to be considered than remaining as we are between the barriers of religious bigotry".' (ibid. p. 125)

In the event many of their fears about partition were realised, the new Northern Ireland state was born on a wave of sectarian violence which surpassed anything Belfast had suffered in the past. However, once the state had been consolidated, the outward forms of democracy were observed, although they were distorted to exclude Catholics from power as much as possible.

This ushered in a new phase for Belfast Labour; in 1925 their influence was again expanding, and they were to be found reiterating many of the old Walkerite ideas. The Northern Ireland general election of 1925 was called over the issue of the Boundary Commission, set up under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act to mediate between South and North over possible changes in the border. The Unionists made this out to be a threat to Northern Ireland, but to the ILP paper *Labour Opposition* it was the 'Boundary Bogey'. The Labour candidate for North Belfast, Sam Kyle, declared that: '. . . the boundary which most concerned me is that between the poor who have no bread and the rich who have a surplus.' He went on to expand on Labour's attitude to the South:

'As a citizen of Belfast I do not desire to see anything that would cause bloodshed or any aggravation of the relations between the North and the South. Sir James Craig has stated that it is a matter that can only be settled as between the contending parties. This is following the lead of Mr. MacDonald who, when Labour Prime Minister, endeavoured to bring the nations of Europe to agreement on the same lines. Until the Free State is prepared to give the same conditions to teachers, OAPs and Unemployment Insurance as we have in Northern Ireland we in the North should not permit any worsening of our position.' (*LO* April 1925)

With the refusal of the Nationalists to take their seats in the Northern Ireland Parliament, Labour became the official Oppostion, pledged to a programme which included demands for pensions on the same scale as Britain, the establishment of a Ministry of Health, work or maintenance for the unemployed and homes for all. The old Walkerite tradition of seeking to benefit from progress in Britain is evident here. It is interesting, however, that in their proposals for railway nationalisation, they suggested joint ownership and control, through a special commission, by both Southern and Northern Governments. (See *LO* August 1925)

Just as practical considerations had motivated their previous opposition to partition, the apparent solidity of the state, and the gap which had appeared in social policies between North and South inclined them towards acceptance of the status quo. In the November 1925 edition of *Labour Opposition*, Jack Brand suggested that the matter be looked at again:

'. . . a Regional Parliament might perform a useful function in the evolution of the social fabric of Ireland. Socialists accept . . . that political institutions should reflect the economic structure of the time . . . May the writer suggest that there is a use for a Northern Ireland Assembly, covering a region with a political history different than the rest of Ireland . . .? The Socialist view is that the structure of a modern state should allow as much local autonomy as possible . . . A Regional Assembly for the North is in harmony with these fundamental requirements . . .'

The article, however, stopped short of advocating recognition of the existing set-up, and there was much to alienate Labour from the new state.

They responded with disgust to the speech of a Unionist candidate during the 1925 election:

'. . . when the next election takes place Mr. Archdale should be muzzled. He is reported to have said – "I have 109 officials and so far as I know, there are four Roman Catholics – three of these were civil servants turned over to me, whom I *had to take* when we began".' (*LO* May 1925)

In October 1925 a Labour Movement demonstration against unemployment was banned by the Government, and November's *Labour Oppostion* blazed at 'Tory Sedition':

'The Tory Party of Ulster have long been notorious for Sedition, Treason and Disloyalty, and many of our present legislators had their unconstitutional activities rewarded by the glittering prizes of office under the Crown. Mr. Hanna indeed has the brazen effrontery to quote the "law" on sedition during the debate on the proclaimed Labour Demonstration, but he and the other hypocrites were sharply reminded by the Labour MPs that the Labour Party had always been a constitutional party, whereas the record of the Government would not stand examination.'

Whatever they may have thought of its legitimacy, Labour, as a 'constitutional party', was bound to work within the given political system. Their tendencies towards acceptance of it, however, were strengthened by the fact that the border did weaken their links with the Labour Movement in the South, while the growth of Labour in Britain inspired admiration and hope. Belfast has always been strongly influenced by Clydeside, and the victories of the Scottish ILP in the 1919 general election gave Belfast Labour a model which was almost as geographically close as Dublin, and culturally much closer. 'Red Clydesiders' like David Kirkwood and James Maxton came to speak to major meetings in Belfast, and *Labour Oppostion* is reminiscent of *Forward* in design and content. 'Maxton's Messages to Belfast' in the *Opposition* of April 1925 expresses their still bright hopes:

'Here as in Scotland is a race of men who will refuse to suffer forever the intolerable conditions imposed on them by the Capitalist system; here are men who will combine in their Trade Union and their ILP branches to work together to overthrow the present mad system . . . Socialism is a cause big enough to swallow up all smaller differences and to bind together peoples of all races and creeds. Socialism is the hope of the world . . .'

In 1949, influenced by the British Labour Government's social legislation, which had been extended to Northern Ireland,

Labour in the province finally decided that their future lay with Westminster, and accepted the constituion of the Northern Ireland state.

## Conclusions

In its theory and practice, Belfast Labour reflected the divided city in which it grew up, and it never resolved those contradictions. While it can be criticised for a mechanical counterposition of 'Socialism' to the problem of Ireland's constitutional status, it must be exonerated of charges of 'Orange Socialism'. Moreover the ideas of Belfast Labour, particularly those contributed by William Walker, were more complex and more consistent than a superficial examination would suggest. Throughout the three phases we have examined – anti-Home Rule – anti-Partition – gradual rapprochement with Northern Ireland – certain common themes appear. However, the strongest common thread is the influence of British Labourism, and the ultimate failure of Belfast Labour must be strong evidence that British Labourism did not contain the elements necessary for a solution of the immense problems confronting Belfast socialists.

### Notes

1. In researching this article I was greatly assisted by having access to Austen Morgan's doctoral thesis on the Belfast Labour Movement. The book which he is preparing on the basis of that thesis will supercede this article in range and scope; responsibility for the analysis presented here is, however, mine alone.
2. The Trades Council was founded in the early 1890s, in 1892 a Belfast Labour Party was formed, and in 1895 the Trades Council President Alexander Bowman stood as a Lib-Lab candidate, winning a 'respectable number of votes' (Mitchell 1974 p. 18). Throughout I refer to the dominant political trends within the Labour Movement as 'Belfast Labour' and it is important to note that there was always dissent from Conservatives, Unionists, Independent Orangement, Nationalists and Republicans within the Labour Movement.
3. The *Irish News* for 6 October 1920 reported that there were 8,140 registered expelled workers, and that another 500 had been forced out of their employment the previous day.
4. The 'Big' yard was Harland and Woolf, and the 'Wee' yard was Workman Clark – a large yard in comparison to most British shipyards.
5. This is not to say that the Irish Labour Party has not had problems, including large fluctuations in its vote, and splits caused by inter-union animosities. But there has always been a basic Labour vote, larger and more consistent than that of the NILP.
6. It is worth pointing out that Belfast is unique not only in relation to British and Irish cities, but within Northern Ireland itself. The only other city – Derry – has a two-thirds Catholic majority, an exact reversal of Belfast's proportions. Moreover it has been dominated by textiles and shirt making, rather than by heavy industry. This means that politics and sectarian relations have been different. The smaller towns tend to reflect the less volatile sectarianism of the countryside.

   The only other city which resembles Belfast is Glasgow, which is similar in economy, culture, sectarian composition, and relationships to its geographical area (see Budge and O'Leary 1973, p. xiv). But despite the similarities and the direct links between sectarian cultures in the two cities, in Glasgow the problem has been effectively de-politicised.
7. I do not propose to deal in detail with this debate, which is well known, and is available in an inexpensive pamphlet (see also Greaves pp. 209-12 and Levenson 1973, pp. 197-8).
8. The Belfast Socialist Society seems to have been started in about 1895, as a socialist propaganda group, after the ILP had been intimidated out of holding open-air meetings. It seems to have been parallel to, but not identical in composition to, the ILP. There is no clear indication of when it was formally wound up, nor is there any date on the leaflet quoted, but it must have been some time after 1901, since it is signed by Thomas Johnson, as secretary, and he moved to Belfast in that year (Johnson, an English Protestant, became leader of the Labour Party in Dail Eireann during the early years of the Free State).
9. The British National Anthem, and the Union Jack, have always had strong sectarian associations in Belfast.
10. Belfast shipyard workers provide an interesting test case for the theory of a 'labour aristocracy', as a layer of privileged workers, with a conservative outlook, within the working class (see Bell, Gibbon, and Reed, 1980).
11. Walker and most of Belfast Labour supported free trade, but there were Conservatives on the Trades Council who were favourable to Chamberlain's proposals. On this issue they were saying remarkably similar things to the protectionist policies of Arthur Griffiths' Sinn Fein (see Trades Council minutes, 19.9.03 and 21.11.03).
12. Walker was President of Belfast Trades Council and Organiser for the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners.
13. That this was not a chance remark, and that it represented something basic to Walker's outlook is shown by an article he wrote in the *Chronicle* of January 1905, in which, replying to attacks made on him at a meeting where he spoke of Puritan intolerance to other Protestants, he said:

    'In modern Britain we rightly owe our religious freedom to the fact that the predominant power was not of one sect but of a number. Churchman, Presbyterian, Methodist, Jew, etc. have commingled to give stability to the government and freedom to the subject, but one cannot doubt that if any of the sects obtained the ascendancy, such ascendancy would naturally mean the subordination of the others . . . civil and religious liberty is only guaranteed when the governing power is heterogenous and not homogenous, when different sects compose the "Cabinet" and the Government and are striving to coalesce and not destroy each other.'
14. 'Big drums' refers to the giant Lambeg Drums, which are played on Orange processions.
15. Although Pete Curran MP complained that Walker had contravened the LRC constitution by describing himself as a 'Labour Unionist', an official report from that body exonerated Walker (see *BLC* 28.10.05).
16. Davitt's death was marked by a sympathetic obituary in the *BLC* 6.1.06.
17. J. P. Nannetti was the Lib-Lab MP for Dublin, College Green. He was an advocate of an association between the Irish Labour Movement and the Irish Party.
18. The North Branch, however, was probably stronger and more active than the combined strength of the branches which went into the ILP[1].
19. The Unionists had set up the Ulster Unionist Labour Association in 1918 to counter accusations that they were anti-Labour. Joseph Cunningham was active in this, but it never amounted to more than a front for the Unionist Party.

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# Marxism, the state and Northern Ireland

*The State in Northern Ireland 1921-72*
**by Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson**
(Manchester University Press 1979)

Richard Chessum

To say that this new book by these three authors is an important one is perhaps to state the obvious. Analyses of the state in Northern Ireland and of the last decade of conflict, as opposed to empirical accounts and journalistic impressions, are not exactly plentiful. And *Marxist* analyses are even rarer. One indication of the extent to which the major political issue of Northern Ireland has been neglected – by British Marxists in particular – is that the journal New Left Review has not contained a single article on Ireland since one of the three authors of this book contributed one over a decade ago.

It is therefore with this background of neglect in mind that we should greet this new contribution and welcome its arrival. It is a readable book with a relative absence of academic jargon – excepting a brief passage of dialogue with Hindess and Hirst which is perhaps inevitably more difficult given the subject matter and the work to which it is a response – and could be read with ease by most political activists.

On the other hand, the function of the book is certainly not to guide political action. The authors concentrate on attempting to undermine the analyses of Northern Ireland which are the foundation of most of the political activity being undertaken at the present time by Marxists, without attempting to suggest an alternative political practice. "This is not the place to develop an alternative perspective" they say. Until the right place is found for such a project, we must therefore be content with their present work, which is extremely thought provoking and might best be regarded as a sort of intellectual *agent provocateur.*

## Aim

The authors appear a little uncertain about the status of this present work:

> 'The great unfulfilled need of Irish Marxist politics is a scientific analysis of Irish society. This objective however is a long term one. It is not possible to wish such an analysis into being, as its construction requires a substantial period being devoted not only to the assembly of raw materials but to the clarification of concepts . . . The authors of this work have set themselves a more modest goal – a partial survey of the economy and politics of Northern Ireland – in the hope that it may provide a kind of signpost for this larger objective.'

On the other hand:

> 'The research described here will be employed to propose *definitive* answers to the principal questions raised over and over again by Northern Ireland's historians and commentators'.

The first of these statements seems to imply an Althusserian notion of 'scientific' work as being somehow divorced from 'political' work and has as its consequence a certain separation of theory from political practice. It is fortunate indeed that academics have the space and time to develop their scientific analyses, but the actual participants in the Irish conflict are unlikely to enjoy a 'substantial period' in which they are not called upon to make political judgements based upon their own very inadequate experience and understandings. The second statement, however, with its use of the word 'definitive' makes rather a large claim on behalf of the present book. Can such a claim ever be justified? Of any book that has been written or is likely to be written on Northern Ireland?

## State and Nation

If they have doubts about the book's status however, the authors have none about its main *focus.* As the title unambiguously states it is about the '*state* in Northern Ireland'. Too much time has been spent, they tell us, on discussions of 'nations', 'nationalities', and their 'right' to self determination. Marx and Engels were opposed to making a moral principle of self determination, and Lenin was against constructing abstract definitions of nations and nationalism. Most 'Marxist' writing on Ireland has ignored or misunderstood Marx, Engels and Lenin, and consequently fallen into the trap of mistaking moral exhortation for political analysis. This in turn has resulted in tail-ending either the nationalist or unionist bourgeoisie instead of producing a distinctively Marxist political practice.

There is a great deal of substance in this argument, especially as it is applied to the advocates of the 'Two Nations' theory (the British and Irish Communist Organisation) and some of their adversaries who have replied to them within their own theoretical framework. However, to exclude discussion of nations and nationalities from an attempt to analyse Northern Ireland is to ignore a very important dimension of the task before us: it is to neglect the self identifications made with these entities by the actual participants in the conflict, to exclude from our range of vision whole areas of their consciousness. Nations may not lend themselves to 'objective definitions' or to 'the clarification of concepts', but they nonetheless have a crucial importance in any adequate analysis if only by virtue of the fact that they are subjectively defined as 'real' by those most likely to influence events.

It should not be necessary to add that the work of Marxists must also include a study of why individuals and groups make the self identifications that they do, i.e. the material basis of their consciousness. But to restrict ourselves to analyses of states and ignore the reality of nations in the minds of those in conflict is to forget that many express an allegiance not to the former but to the latter.

## Class Divisions

Bew, Gibbon and Patterson attack the crude formulation of the 'Northern Ireland problem' as a conflict between Catholics and Protestants as generic subjects:

> 'It requires a considerable effort to make the point against this prevailing orthodoxy that the problem cannot be understood at the level of the 'Protestant community' on the one hand and 'the Catholic community' on the other. It must be insisted that the problem of 'the two communities' is

the problem of the reproduction of two class alliances.'

As a criticism of the simple and naive 'community relations' approach, this is unexceptionable. As a reaffirmation of the basic Marxist view that class divisions are at the root of all capitalist societies and, in the long run, determine their direction, it is very necessary. Once again, however, there is a danger: that not only the reality of Catholic-Protestant polarisation will be overshadowed, but that its *resilience* will be underestimated in this approach.

The authors call for 'the applications of concepts designed to understand class struggles structured by the unfolding of internal elements . . . such concepts must analyse how in Northern Ireland the local Protestant bourgeoisie gained and held power, how it maintained a block of alliance of classes identifying with its rule, and how it divided and oppressed the classes and groups that opposed it . . . the emphasis in the analysis that follows will, in other words, be on the *internal relations* within the Protestant block'.

Exclusive concentration on these internal relations can produce an analysis as one dimensional as that of the 'community relations' approach so severely criticised. In particular, the very real material relations of inequality which exist between Catholic and Protestant produced by differential access to privilege and power, have to be given a central place in any account of the Northern Ireland society. The capital-labour relationship within the mode of production is not the only significant material relationship which acts as a major determinant of political consciousness. To concede this point and incorporate it in our theoretical work is not to reject Marxism. To be a Catholic in Northern Ireland is to experience relative powerlessness in just as real a way as to be working class. The criticism of Bew, Gibbon and Patterson must be that whilst their empirical work (reproduced in this book) makes this fact abundantly clear, their theoretical work shows less sign of it having been adequately accommodated.

## The Northern Ireland State

Referring to the main task of their book, they proclaim:

'The state is the central Marxist Leninist concept which makes it possible to elucidate class relations such as these. The state represents the 'condensation' of politics in bourgeois societies. Its content is both the necessary product of the general and specific antagonisms of such societies and the means by which these are moderated to the advantage of the dominant class. The state provides a 'shell' for class rule, lending it a stable and more or less permanent institutional character. Above all the state is the means by which the dominant class subordinates and divides other classes'.

These rather high level generalisations about the manner in which we should conceptualise the state tell us very little about which sets of relationships they see as being the basic institutions of the state. And it would be useful to know this, especially since the Preface to the book (written by themselves) refers not just to the Northern Ireland state, but to *'its destruction in 1972'*. Indeed, they specifically state that the overthrow of the power of the Unionist Party 'coincided with the destruction of the state itself', and pose this as one of the major 'facts' to be explained.

But what exactly was destroyed by Direct Rule and William Whitelaw? The 'ideological state apparatuses'? If so, which ones? The 'armed bodies of men'? Only the B Specials disappeared and then to reappear in a different guise, more heavily armed than before. The Northern Ireland state shows every sign of having survived more or less intact.

Again, it would be useful to know whether they believe that 'the state in Northern Ireland' briefly rose from the dead in 1974 during the lifetime of the power sharing executive? Presumably it then ascended into heaven after the shock of the UWC strike? Ian Paisley does indeed claim to be filled with its Holy Ghost.

In one very important aspect this book does however contribute a great deal that is of value. In its emphasis on 'the relative autonomy of the political', it casts doubt on the 'economistic' interpretations both of partition itself and of more recent developments within the Northern Ireland state. Political decisions are quite correctly seen to be only occasionally direct reflections of the immediate economic interests of the ruling class or fractions of it, and much more frequently a consequence of the mediations of a complex combination of considerations related to the most basic function of any capitalist state – the need to ensure the continued dominance of the ruling class over the subordinate class.

This approach rules out both the simple view of the British and Irish Communist Organisation which sees in the 'uneven development' of Irish capitalism an adequate explanation of the setting up of two separate states, *and* the naive conspiracy theory of some nationalists which views partition as the consequence merely of the economic interests (in an immediate sense) of the British and Northern Irish bourgeoisie. Partition was neither the culmination of a natural process in which the political arrangements of Ireland were brought neatly into line with its economic development, *nor* the outcome of sinister manoeuvring on the part of an imperialist power determined to hold on to as much of a colonised country as it could.

It is in the presentation of their alternative explanation however (which it must be said is not exactly new) that the authors reveal the weakness of their own political stance. For in emphasising the autonomous political activity and ideology of the Protestant masses as the major factor determining the nature of the newly created Northern Ireland state, they undermine the credibility of their own basic position.

In the absence of the presentation of an alternative political perspective, their actual standpoint can be inferred from statements like the following:

'. . . contrary to common assumption, there is nothing inherently reactionary about the Protestant working class or, for that matter, a national frontier which puts Protestants in a numerical majority'.

Logically, who can fault such a statement? But what can be their purpose in making it? Their book is an *historical* analysis and we are not dealing with 'essences'. Just subtract the word 'inherently' from the statement and it is plainly false – in every historical period in the history of the state.

Again they quote with approval an article written in 1940 in which the author favoured asserts:

'I do not regard the present intolerable position of Catholics in the partitioned area as being a necessary consequence of partition as such, but rather the result of a particular form of administration'.

Once more, there can be no argument. But the assertion is meaningless. The

Bill Kirk

**Orangemen in Newtownards, Co. Down.**

crucial question is whether the '*particular form of administration*' is a 'necessary consequence of partition' in the context of the social and political balance of forces in which it occurred. And Bew, Gibbon and Patterson seem to suggest by the evidence that they *themselves* produce that it is.

For their main argument concerning the nature of the state and its basic cause is summed up as follows:

> 'The strategy of class alliance pursued by the Unionist bourgeoisie, together with the diplomatic strategies of the British ruling class, were responsible for the establishment of a Northern state with a sectarian-populist flavour'.

The reference to the diplomatic strategies of the British ruling class refers in part to the British Government's flexibility as to political arrangements concerning the Six Counties at the time of the war of independence, and its willingness to put pressure on the Unionists later to bolster the Free Staters against the De Valera Republicans in the South. With the British ruling class divided and unreliable, the Unionist bourgeoisie were thus obliged to turn to 'their own people' for support.

## Populism

The all important question of the strategy of class alliance is dealt with at some length. Independent Orangeism based on 'the Protestant labour aristocracy, urban petty bourgeoisie and small employers' had 'a clear and distinct ideology combining militant anti-Catholicism with democratic, anti-landlord and anti-capitalist sentiment'. Let us leave on one side the problematical nature of an 'anti-capitalism' espoused by small employers and accept the view of Bew, Gibbon and Patterson that it was such an autonomous force in Protestant politics which persuaded the Protestant bourgeoisie to make itself independent of the Conservative Party (the party of the British establishment) at Westminster, and to create the Unionist Party. The huge paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force then integrated the Protestant masses with the Protestant landlords and capitalists, and the forces that represented the hitherto autonomous movement 'were stripped of their progressive elements'. Throughout the early period of the state there was to be a conflict within the state between 'populist' and 'anti-populist' elements, with the former invariably emerging as the dominant force, due to the over-riding strategic need of the Protestant ruling class: the maintenance of its hegemony over the subordinate Protestant masses by acquiescing in and basing itself upon the sectarian consciousness of those masses.

All of this, one might have thought, would have convinced even the authors that 'a national frontier which puts Protestants in a numerical majority' is likely to be, for the foreseeable future, a massive boost for the forces of reaction and a near insuperable obstacle for the forces of progress. Connolly was seldom more perceptive than when he made his

Bo Bojesen

**Loyalists during the 1974 apprentice boys' march. (From Camerawork)**

predictions about this. Yet our present authors would seem to have it otherwise. Again we have the exceptional moments which prove the rule dragged up to produce a conclusion which flies in the face of both evidence and analysis:

> 'The sectarian and supremacist ideologies of the Protestant masses have been condoned and encouraged by the ruling class throughout the history of the state. But at various times the predominant populist strategy has been incapable of producing hegemony. Important sections of the Protestant proletariat have come under the influence of relatively secular labourism'.

Finally, they declare 'only with the *present* struggle' have 'progressive tendencies' in the Protestant bloc been '*completely* submerged'. So it *is* those mad bombers who are to blame after all.

## Reform

It is in their analysis of 'O'Neillism' that Bew, Gibbon and Patterson depart substantially from much previous Marxist analysis of recent developments in the Six Counties. Writers as far apart in their political viewpoints as Michael Farrell and Anders Boserup have seen the rise of the 'modernising' 'reforming' Capt. Terence O'Neill as the product of changes in the Irish economy – and the Northern Irish economy in particular – which have resulted in a different type of capitalism becoming dominant in the Six Counties. With the decline of the old staple industries of linen, engineering and shipbuilding, as well as of agriculture, and the influx of new foreign investment, the older family firms so characteristic of Northern Ireland's economy in the past have been rapidly replaced by new multinational concerns attracted by generous tax concessions and grants and subsidies. The increasing replacement of local capital by foreign monopoly capital created a situation in which many employers no longer had a vested interest in discrimination.

In addition, a similar process of foreign multinational investment in the South made good relations between North and South a necessity in order to 'rationalise' investment decisions and economic activity, especially in view of the impending entry of both parts of Ireland into the EEC. In response to both of these factors Capt. O'Neill therefore began the process of desectarianising the Northern Ireland state, whose populist sectarian nature now became a hindrance to the development of capital.

The political implications of this analysis were very different for Farrell and Boserup respectively. According to Boserup monopoly capital had a progressive role to play in the Six Counties in the break up of Orangeism. Only the foolishness of Republicanism with its armed aggression against the state prevented the monopolies backed by the British state from playing this role. For Farrell, it was not so simple. The forces of monopoly capital backed by O'Neill raised expectations among Catholics which O'Neill could not fulfil because of the resistance of large sections of the Unionist Party. This resulted in the Civil Rights Movement which, in turn, led to the backlash of the Protestant working class and petty bourgeoisie who saw their ascendancy threatened, and eventually under the impact of the Catholic upsurge the old Unionist monolith broke up.

Bew, Gibbon and Patterson reject this entire analysis. They analyse O'Neill not by looking at conflicts between different sections of capital, but by again asking how the agents of the Northern Ireland state were constrained to act to maintain their hegemony over the Protestant masses in a situation of increasing unemployment. The decline of the old industries had thrown many Protestant workers out of their jobs, heightened their feelings of discontent with the economic policies (or lack of them) of the state to deal with the situation and thrown many of them into the arms of the Northern Ireland Labour Party which won 4 seats in Stormont in 1958 and

again in 1962. Thus it was in response to the need to re-assert the hegemony of the Protestant ruling class and win back these Protestant workers that O'Neill adopted a more interventionist stance in his economic policies and associated his government with the concept of indicative planning. Say the authors:

> "O'Neill's economic policies bore no relation to intercommunal relations. Their raison d'etre lay only in political conflicts within the Protestant bloc. . . . The new departure required the centralisation of initiative at Stormont within a relatively small group of Ministers and civil servants".

This was to create divisions between the Unionists since the Unionist Party had always emphasised local autonomy and local initiative. It succeeded however in undercutting the support given to the NILP by effectively stealing many of the latter's policies and rhetoric, and this was the paramount consideration.

In an important paragraph, Bew Gibbon and Patterson sum up their view on previous Marxist treatments of O'Neill:

> "By effectively ignoring the State, or treating it as an epiphenomenal expression of the economic interests of different sections of capital, writers like Farrell and Boserup fundamentally misinterpret the history of the 50's and early 60's. The ironic consequence is that both end up crediting O'Neill with the intention of reforming sectarian structures (although his attempts are then dismissed as feeble). In fact, he had no such reforming zeal. The belief that he had is the other side of the coin to the view that the bourgeoisie 'created' sectarianism, that is, it sees sectarianism as a tactic to be now adopted, now dropped."

Again, it must be said that by concentrating exclusively on relations *within* the Protestant bloc, they may be producing a one sided picture. Nonetheless it could well be that the new synthesis which emerges in the course of time on the Marxist left on this particular question will be closer to that of these authors than to that of other Marxists who have written on it.

## Loyalist Responses

Two points need raising however in connection with this analysis. Firstly, the authors will doubtless stress that the defection of sections of Protestant workers to the NILP which led to O'Neillism (a feeble version of the New Deal) is a clear indication of their ability and willingness to break from Orange ideology and politics in the presence of a viable and attractive alternative.

But if their analysis is correct, those same workers quickly returned to the Unionist fold when their demands appeared to be in the process of being met by the Party to which they had traditionally owed allegiance. For it was the bombing campaign which led them to return to their traditional ways, nor even the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, but the new economic policies of the Unionist Government. This would suggest that the original defection was less a positive and enthusiastic choice, than an act of desperation – or at the very least a way of voicing protest. Once the Unionist Party seemed to take more notice of their plight, they went back home with a sigh of relief. Moreover, their later defection from O'Neillism itself following the new assertiveness of the Catholics, suggests the very phenomenon that Bew, Gibbon and Patterson wish to underplay: the resilience and strength of populist sectarianism whenever the Protestant ascendancy seems in danger.

The second point that requires consideration is this: if O'Neill did not represent the political aspirations of a newly dominant fraction of the bourgeoisie, then what was the pressure leading to reforms (or, at least, reforming gestures) relation to the sectarian nature of the 6 County State? According to the authors, it was almost entirely to be explained by pressure from Westminster. They even lay an extraordinary amount of stress on the personal views of Harold Wilson. And this is related to a more general point which they make about the alleged impotence and inactivity of the Loyalist right in the early 1970's. After referring to the collapse of, not only O'Neill, but every kind of 'centre politics, they say:

> "Much more remarkable was the failure of the right to take advantage of the centre's unpopularity. It was suprisingly timid throughout the period, for reasons which at the time were not altogether clear. It was even more timid when Direct Rule was actually introduced – the threatened holocaust dissolved into a series of peaceful rallies. In fact, the right (and even this did not include much of the parliamentary right) was not to launch a real offensive until the UWC strike of 1974".

An interview with William Craig in 1976 is then used as evidence of why this was so. Allegedly, it was due to "a calculation that the British ruling class had the will to take the Loyalists on". They continue:

> "Broader implications: if this view held by the right, which was presumably shared by the centre too, is related to the motives behind O'Neill's movement towards general placation in 1964, a compelling continuity appears. There was a common conviction throughout Unionist politics and throughout the 8 years preceding Direct Rule that a substantial British intervention in Northern Ireland was a significant probability".

The authors state their view that this was a wrong calculation, "contrary both to historical indications and the reality of British strategy". But the important point was that the Unionists made it.

But is this a plausible story? William Craig himself was scarcely quiescent during this period. The 'peaceful rallies' referred to included inspections by him of serried ranks of para-military men in UDA uniform, motor cycle escorts and Nazi style salutes. Craig made speeches which amounted almost to incitement to murder (the famous 'we will assassinate our enemies' speech, for example), and which were certainly designed to call the bluff of the British government. He pointed to his para-military friends and claimed to have tens of thousands behind him who were prepared 'to come out and shoot to kill'.

> "We in Vanguard feel the time for talk is over. We want the Ulster Loyalists to commit themselves to the course of action."
>
> "We will be preparing contingency plans which will make any political initiatives which are unacceptable to the majority unworkable".
>
> "Let there be no doubt that Ulster Loyalists will fight if they have to fight".

Statements such as these just before and just after Direct Rule provide us with a different picture of the Loyalist right from that painted in the book under discussion. For they *were* accompanied by assassination campaigns and the building up of extra parliamentary and para-military organisation. One of the UDA leaders was later to comment upon Mr. Craig's interest in his own political skin 'The UDA was being asked to march on Rome while Mussolini took the train'. Nonetheless a strategy of calling the bluff of the British Government was of little use if it was calculated that that bluff could not be called. It is safe to assume that William Craig – and other right wing Loyalists – were doing a little more than merely articulating the desperation felt by the Protestant masses in order to maintain their support.

Perhaps this last discussion relates to the authors' remarks in the Preface to their book, discussed earlier. If it is really true that the *state* was destroyed in 1972 with the introduction of Direct Rule, then indeed one would have expected the ultimate sacrifice from the Protestant Loyalists, a famous last stand'. If, on the other hand, we take a more realistic view of what happened under William Whitelaw, as well as looking at what has been happening since, the postponement of such a 'last stand' by the Loyalists becomes easy to understand. Over the last 6 years in particular we have seen the strengthening of the Loyalist state and the political forces of extreme Loyalism under Rev. Ian Paisley. Despite setbacks necessitated by extraordinary crises of British policy, the Loyalists have *not* yet lost their state. They have battled, they have sometimes fought militarily, but they have consistently bluffed – and bluffed successfully. The British state has not yet taken them on, and shows less sign of doing so now than at any time in the last 10 years.

How many more books will Bew, Gibbon and Patterson write before it happens?

**Richard Chessum**

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# The SDLP's 'New Ireland'

Keith Savage

Humphrey Atkins' conference on the constitutional future of Northern Ireland has attracted little interest from the British media. This cannot be explained away by the fact that such things do not make good news or provide television with enough action-packed newsreel. The London talks on the future of Zimbabwe were the subject of regular TV reports, for example. Part of the problem for media reporters is, no doubt, the fact that talks and Northern Ireland don't, somehow, go together. For TV and newspapers, reports on Ireland are concerned with upheaval and violence. Disruption, not coherence, is the key. Rational talks are difficult to explain in what is reported to be the Northern Ireland context.

This also goes some way to explaining the way in which the proposals of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) have been 'overlooked' by British reporters. As we shall see the SDLP have put forward proposals – which have the support of Irish-Americans and the Premier of the 26 counties – that approach a solution to the 'Irish problem' from a different stance than the need to defeat 'terrorism' (see the box below for details of the SDLP's position on 'security'). As such the SDLP are immediately out of sympathy with the consensus of, say, the British Government, the Unionist Parties and the media. Accordingly there is now little room for the SDLP within media notions of 'balance'. (See Carl Gardner's article in *ISR4* for a closer examination of this notion.)

## The Irish Dimension

When first invited to attend the conference the SDLP declined. Their main reason was Atkins' insistence that discussions about the future relationship between the North and the rest of Ireland ('the Irish dimension') would be ruled out of order. SDLP chairperson, Brid Rodgers, was reported as saying that structures of government must be found and agreed on which would allow the 'Irish in Northern Ireland' to express their Irishness without being branded as extremists. She added that they must be allowed 'to participate as of right in the formation of legislation which governs their lives' (*Irish Times*, 4.12.79).

SDLP leader, Gerry Fitt, resigned from the Party when the decision to abstain from the conference was reached. When, subsequently, the SDLP – now lead by John Hume – reversed its original decision it was not a matter of surprise to find Unionists suspicious. Had Atkins changed the agenda to facilitate discussion of the Irish dimension? Molyneaux insisted that Atkins had. 'It must now mean that that item (the Irish dimension) has been inserted on the agenda. That takes us back to Captain O'Neill's time and it takes us back to Sunningdale. Such things definitely endanger the Union' (*Irish Times*, 17.12.79).

What in fact was the basis for the SDLP's decision to participate? It seems that Atkins conceded very little but it was enough for Hume to claim an honourable victory. Amongst the agreements was one which allowed for the parties participating to present a paper to the conference outlining their proposals for the future government of Northern Ireland. The SDLP would, therefore, be able to put forward its views. Having done that, however, it was to be left to conference to come to a decision as to how to deal with points made. Paisley would, presumably, move next business when 'the Irish dimension' was raised. In practice this is what happened. Atkins got round this by arranging a second tier of talks with each party. Paisley boycotted these.

It was another agreement that Hume regarded as being especially historic. The Government was prepared to concede that if at any point in the future the majority of the people of Northern Ireland decided to change their constitutional status – in favour of Independence or unity with the 26 counties, say – then the Government would not stand in their way. At the same time this 'concession' did not affect the Government's position that no constitutional change could be made without the express wish of the majority of the Northern Irish people. Hume claimed that this meant that 'Britain is saying she no longer has any interest in remaining here – in the past the Union was two-sided. The British Government hasn't said that since 1973' (*Irish Times*, 17.1279).

## Towards a New Ireland

When the conference opened on January 7 the SDLP had its policy proposals ready for presentation. Their document is called *Towards a New Ireland*. It is worth quoting from this paper at length because the views of the SDLP are likely to strike a sympathetic chord in British socialist traditions. The whole paper is written in eminently reasonable terms and, unlike the views of Unionism, can be judged as a positive contribution to a settlement in Ireland.

The SDLP start from the notion that any solution must be based on 'partnership between the differing traditions in the North and partnership between both parts of Ireland'. Quoting from the 1975 SDLP Report to Parliament they continue, '"we are not irrevocably committed to anyone system of power-sharing in Government", and that North-South partnership would be on the basis of that which was "freely agreed between North and South"'.

They then go on to account for the political vacuum that has strangled Northern Irish politics. 'The response of the Unionist parties, however, has been one of absolute intransigence . . . British Government reaction has been equally negative, allowing the disastrous vacuum of the past four years to develop without any serious effort to take the initiative in seeking agreement . . . they have consistently insisted on and upheld as a basis of policy an unconditional guarantee of the basic political position of those same Unionists. Yet what has this guarantee achieved?'

Answered their own question the SDLP say that this very guarantee accounts for Unionist intransigence. 'As a result of the ensuing vacuum, violence has flourished, extreme political groupings have prospered and the capacity to find agreement through the normal process of negotiation between the Northern Irish political parties has been substantially diminished.'

Given this the SDLP look to the Irish and British Governments – as the two sovereign Governments involved – for an initiative. 'Neither Government can afford to act or deliberate about the Northern Irish problem in isolation from the other; both owe it to those whom they govern to create jointly political stability, which will in turn promote real and lasting peace, economic development and social stability . . .'

'As a first step they should make it clear that there are no longer any unconditional guarantees for any sections of the Northern community, but rather a commitment to achieve a situation in which there are guarantees for all.'

This, for the British Government, must mean an acknowledgement that the whole basis of its past policy is wrong: that guarantees to Unionism are only a guarantee to intransigence. 'The Irish Government in turn, must acknowledge that its claim to unity, while it remains undefined in that they are reluctant to spell out its economic, social and political impli-

cations, is interpreted by many Unionists as a real threat. They must clearly demonstrate that they are prepared to accept the sacrifices involved in real unity, including the social changes which will demonstrate that Irish life is not dominated by any one section or tradition.'

This would involve for both governments a commitment to the establishment of 'a clearly-defined process which will enable progress to be made in all areas directly and indirectly affecting Northern Ireland and its relations with the rest of the island, with Britain and the EEC . . . a process of integration of the differing traditions on this island, a process designed to lead to an agreed Ireland with positive roles for all.'

'One of the initial steps in this process might be the creation of a viable administration in the North, based on partnership and participation at every level, which would command the active support of all sections of the Northern community. The two Sovereign Governments should agree to, and be seen publicly to agree to, the structures, responsibilities and *modus operandi* of the administration . . .' Simultaneously, 'the Governments should set up a Standing Commission to examine in detail the development of Governmental structures in Northern Ireland and the special position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom and within the EEC . . .'

They then go on to talk rather vaguely about the economic and social common ground that exists between both parts of Ireland and the need 'to identify and promote projects which would be of benefit and which would develop the obvious areas of common ground . . .'.

'In making these proposals, the SDLP is aware that some parties in the North will initially refuse to participate in this process of creating a solution as they blindly refute the constructive and conciliatory Irish Dimension which it obviously contains. However, short-sighted intransigence must not be allowed to postpone further the political, economic and social stability which the people of Ireland, North and South, so desperately want and deserve. No longer can the veto of one small section of the Irish people be allowed to condemn the vast majority on the island, who wish to live in peace and agreement, to further decades of suffering and strife. The process must start and the dialogue continue without them while leaving the door open for their eventual participation.'

## Internationalising the Irish Question

The main problem as far as the SDLP is concerned is the application of pressure. As they point out they are seeking to get Britain to admit that its whole past policy was doomed to failure, to get British acceptance that Ireland is one country and that the whole of the Irish people should have a say in the government of the six counties that constitute Northern Ireland.

Hume and the SDLP have cultivated friends in United States Democratic Party circles in the hope that sufficient pressure can be applied through the Presidency. This policy has been dubbed 'internationalising the Irish question'.

As a proposition 'internationalisation' has been canvassed in Britain (by the *Guardian's* Peter Jenkins, see *Hibernia*, 9.8.79, and by academic Bernard Crick, see *New Statesman*, 7.12.79) but the significant developments have taken place in the US.

On October 25 1979 Margaret Thatcher had dinner in London with the US ambassador, Kingman Brewster. On the same day her government announced plans for a new political initiative on Northern Ireland. This 'coincidence' was fortunate since it allowed Thatcher to convey her determination to do something, thereby answering her international critics.

Irish-American concern over British policy is, of course, long-standing but it is only necessary to go back three years to trace the present phase. In August 1977 President Carter made an offer of financial aid to Northern Ireland once peace had been established. Speaking on behalf of the US State Department Hodding Carter said, 'As a nation, the United States has close ties of friendship and to all those involved in this situation – Irish, British and the people of Northern Ireland alike . . . In our judgement, a solution can come about only through the efforts of the parties directly involved.' This clearly echoes the SDLP Anglo-Irish dimension, and recognises rights and interests of the Irish Government which Britain and Unionists continue to deny.

Another aspect of SDLP thinking was contained within Edward Kennedy's 1978 St Patrick's Day statement. 'Time and time again in recent years, movement towards a negotiated solution has been halted by the intransigence of extremist elements in the Protestant community and by Britain's failure so far to end the festering stalemate.' John Hume's cultivation of Irish-American friends has given him some muscle within US politics. The 'Big Four' Irish-Americans are reckoned to be Kennedy, 'Tip' O'Neill, Hugh Cary and Daniel Moynihan. Of these O'Neill is the most powerful – especially now that Kennedy seems to be out of the contest for the Democratic candidacy in this year's Presidential election. O'Neill is the Speaker of the House of Representatives and is, as such, one of the three most powerful people in US politics. It was O'Neill who earned a rebuke from British politicians and papers last April for his comments in Derry. 'I have been deeply concerned by the lack of political progress in Northern Ireland over the past few years . . . together with all sides in Ireland we insist that Britain bears a responsibility for the failures of recent years on the political front. We have been concerned that the problem has been treated as a political football in London or has otherwise been given a low priority . . . we do insist on an early, realistic and major initiative on the part of the incoming British government . . .'.

## Arms Ban

O'Neill was abused from all sides for his 'interference in British affairs' though it is ironic that Thatcher has since offered her version of an 'early, realistic and major initiative' in the shape of the Atkins' conference. What, for their part, can the Americans do though?

To date there is little that is tangible to point to. Apparently Irish-Americans have secured a promise from Carter that Ireland will be on the agenda whenever he meets Thatcher (*Irish Times*, 20.12.79). The seriousness with which Carter takes pressures from Irish-Americans is evidenced by his insistence on the banning of sales of 3,000 Magnum revolvers to the RUC. Apparently neither the US State Department nor Jack Lynch's Government objected to the sales but Carter insisted that the ban remained. New York Congressman Mario Biaggi is closely involved in the Carter re-election campaign and he commented on the President's decision: 'The RUC has been cited by Amnesty International as well as by a British Government-appointed commission for human rights violations.' Biaggi – who is also Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Congressional Committee for Irish Affairs – introduced an amendment to the 1980 State Department appropriations bill seeking to bar funds for military assistance to Great Britain or the Republic which could be used to 'further oppress the people of Northern Ireland' (*Hibernia*, 9.8.79).

Hume and the SDLP cannot rely on continued American pressure this year. With the Presidential election getting nearer, and bigger international issues – like Afghanistan and Iran – in the political pool it is likely that Ireland will drift as an issue. Moreover, the sooner Kennedy is eliminated from the candidacy the sooner Ireland will be a dead issue.

All this assumes, of course, that nothing happens in Ireland to push it into the centre of world attention again. Such events could have one of two sources – British policies or Irish governmental attitudes.

## Haughey Election

The election of Charles Haughey as leader of Fianna Fail, consequently elevating him to the post of premier, reflects a mood of impatience at the pace of developments in the North. Haughey has indicated his concern to find a solution:

'A start must be made. In my view, a declaration by the British government of their interest in encouraging the unity of Ireland, by agreement and in peace, would open the way

towards an entirely new situation in which peace, real lasting peace, would become an attainable reality.' (*Sunday Times*, 17.2.80).

So, Haughey also echoes the SDLP. The problem still remains, however, how can Britain be persuaded that the policies adopted for the past sixty years are fundamentally wrong? What power does Haughey have? In his favour is the certainty that his argument makes sense. If Ireland was a peaceful and united island then that would make a lot of sense to Britain and the EEC. For Britain, however, this would require the breaking of Unionism, the making of Loyalism as the enemy – not violent Republicanism. These things would not be beyond Britain but why should Thatcher, or anyone else, undertake such a risky venture?*

Such considerations suggest that things are less than bright for the SDLP, Haughey and Irish-Americans. If pressure from the US is uncertain the same is true in relation to the 26 county government. Haughey has more immediate problems. Cutbacks in public spending are on the way, cuts in the rate of economic growth and living standards and all the rest that is so familiar. On top of this Haughey has to resolve the question of taxation which brought 700,000 onto the streets to protest in January. For him actions on Northern Ireland may well be confined to the occasional speech.

## So What?

This brief review of current SDLP policy and the support given to it by politicians in the US and the 26 counties should suggest that the British government will face concerted pressure in the immediate future. For British socialists and the anti-imperialist movement this will present a new set of problems. Over the past decade there has been no sustained and credible critique of British strategy from other bourgeois powers. The developments within the SDLP and Southern Irish parties should now convince people in Britain that the demand for British withdrawal now commands popular support throughout Ireland.

* See articles in *ISR no.5* on federal and independent six-county solutions.

## SDLP ON 'SECURITY'

*'If you apply the system of majority rule in a divided society like ours you get a situation where the majority think of "our law, our Courts, our Police" but the minority think of "their law, their Courts, their Police". When the institutions of the state come under attack this peculiar attitude of both the majority and the minority community towards the state and the police becomes obvious . . .*

*'Since (1974) the Province has been clamped in the full rigours of the Emergency Powers Act for scheduled offences:– no jury, one judge trials: virtually no bail: very lengthy remands in custody: dangerous changes in admissability of evidence: very wide powers of arrest and search without warrant: detention without trial for up to 7 days: severe sentences.*

*'Though these measures were designed to combat specific terrorist activity they have increasingly been used in addition as devices to gather and computerise information generally with the result that very large numbers of innocent persons have been adversely affected often seriously.*

*'These measures were never intended to remain in long term operation because of their restrictive effect on Human Rights and their erosion of the due process of the law; yet imposed in 1973 they are still in operation in 1980. Their impact has also been discriminatory, bearing most heavily on Catholic areas even though paramilitary terror groups operate with equal ferocity from both traditions.*

*'One of the most serious consequences of the continued operation of the Emergency Provisions Act has been the involvement of the security forces (police and army) in patterns of grave breaches of the law.*

*'We welcome the recent declaration of the Secretary of State that the Rule of Law is to be enforced in security operations. However the primacy of law and order has been challenged by the appointment of a former undercover supremo (Sir Maurice Oldfield) to head security and by the announced expansion of undercover activities which are inherently dismissive of legal convention.*

*'Future security policy envisages the continued Ulsterisation of security. This involves the gradual withdrawal of British Army personnel and their replacement by the RUC and UDR. It is a decision which appears to have been taken not in the best interests of Northern Ireland but to enable the British Government to meet its troop commitments elsewhere.*

*'It will inevitably cast the RUC in an ever increasing paramilitary role even though exercising just such a role for the former Stormont government destroyed its acceptability in the past.*

*'Indeed many young policemen who joined the force in the light of the post-Hunt assurances must now feel betrayed knowing as they do that paramilitarism and real police work are antipathetic.*

*'The UDR which in Ulsterisation becomes the RUC's back-up service has by far the worst record for serious sectarian crimes of any Regiment presently in service with the British Armed Forces on land, sea or air.*

*'Former members of the Regiments have been convicted in the Courts of (*inter alia*) sectarian multiple murder; sectarian murder; sectarian attempted murder; sectarian pub bombing in Northern Ireland, England, the Republic of Ireland; sectarian arson; sectarian assault; sectarian intimidation; arms theft of their own weapons; murder to pervert justice; arms offences and common criminality of all kinds, including social security frauds and the robbery of post offices.*

*'The more serious of these crimes have often been connected with loyalist paramilitary activity with which the Regiment is known to be seriously infiltrated . . .*

*'In addition both the RUC and the UDR are overwhelmingly (96 percent and 98 percent respectively) drawn from the loyalist tradition and are therefore completely unrepresentative of the community at large. This to an extent represents Westminster's failure to convince the minority that the dispensation of justice here is evenhanded.*

*'The exclusive pursuit of a military solution to the problems of Northern Ireland has failed to end the violence, which was its sole objective and only justification.*

*'In the process it has found even the penal provisions of the Emergency Powers Act inadequate and forced the security forces into massive breaches of the law.*

*'The end result has been to brutalise the security forces, alienate large sections of the community and weaken support for law and order in a community which is now more polarised than ever. A grim legacy is to be found in the jails of Northern Ireland which now house a ten-fold population explosion in the past decade.'*
**(From paper submitted to Atkins' Conference 30.1.80)**

# Reports

# Provisional Sinn Fein Ard Fheis 1980

Sue O'Halloran

Provisional Sinn Fein's annual Ard Fheis (National Conference) was held in Dublin on the weekend of January 20th/21st, attended by up to 800 delegates from all over Ireland north and south, as well as visitors from Britain and several European countries. There were messages of support from many European groups including O.U.T. (Portugal, represented by Otelo de Carvalho), ETA (Basque), and also SWAPO (Namibia), FRETILIN (East Timor), FSLN (Nicaragua), EPLF (Eritrea), and Partido Socialista (Chile). From Britain solidarity greetings came from the UTOM, Women and Ireland, Big Flame and Hands off Ireland.

This was an important Ard Fheis for Sinn Fein, marking a definite advance in the movement's policy and programme, an advance which is the result of ten years hard experience. A new policy document was presented by the leadership to be debated and voted upon. The document articulates a socialist perspective more appropriate to the problems facing a national liberation movement in a world dominated by multi-national capital, and is a significant up-dating of the old *Eire Nua* document with its more populist ideology.

To Pearse's call for freedom and national sovereignty over Ireland's resources have been added the words of Connolly:

> "We believe that the present system of society is based on the robbery of the working class and that capitalist property cannot exist without the plundering of labour, we desire to see capitalism abolished and a democratic system of common and public ownership erected in its stead. This democratic system, which is called socialism, will, we believe, come as a result of the continuous increase of power of the working class."

The new document, only a brief draft of principles at this stage, outlines strategies to extricate Ireland from the control of international capital. The measures proposed include State control of import and export of capital, public control of finance, insurance and all the key industries, agriculture and fisheries; national and community ownership and control of mineral extraction and processing. All of this was accepted without opposition. The most contentious issue was the policy on ownership of the land. All ranches and estates would be broken up and units leased to families of other groupings of people, to be run cooperatively, in line with national objectives. There would be an upper limit to the amount of land any individual could own, and incentives and restrictions enacted to ensure utilisation of agricultural land in the interests of the people. The aim of these measures is to expand the variety of land use and move towards self-sufficiency in food-production, thus reversing the trend induced by the EEC for land to be concentrated into larger and larger units devoted to beef production for export. Of equal priority is the aim of rural repopulation, since migration from the countryside is having a disastrous effect on Ireland's economic, social and cultural life.

Certain sections of the delegates were worried about the land proposals, as they felt that they amounted to an attack on the small farmer. Other delegates strenuously argued that they were the opposite: an attempt to reverse the current elimination of small farmers and to stem the resulting flight from the countryside. The debate provided a sharp example of the needs of the different sections of the people who must be catered for by a serious movement for socialism, and was a lesson in the crucial importance of carrying along the mass of people in agreement and full understanding of radical policies.

## Democratic Control

While emphasising the need for nationalisation and state direction of the economy, the document lays great stress on democratic control. Popular control has always been a central part of republican philosophy, from the time of its birth in the days of the French Revolution. In the old policy document *Eire Nua* these ideals were articulated within ancient Irish social forms of cooperative, which gave native Irish the right to ownership of the land they worked (called the *Comhar na gComharsan*). These ideals are now given a sounder modern basis as a result of the Republican Movement placing itself within the worldwide tendency in socialism to seek social forms which avoid the rigid and dominating forms of Eastern bloc communism. As one of the socialist Prisoners of War in a British prison has written: "A bureaucratic socialist state would simply mean an upgraded welfare state for workers." (P.R.O., Republican prisoners of war, Albany Jail, Isle of Wight). In the old Eire Nua document, a federal system with Ireland governed by provincial assemblies based on the four ancient provinces of Ireland, was thought to be one political structure which would guarantee popular control. This is now felt to be inadequate and somewhat abstract, and more thought is being given in the new document to methods of genuinely decentralising political and economic power and devolving power down to "the lowest possible unit of government" consistent with the national economic requirements outlined.

The last section of the policy document consists of a strategy for "economic resistance", and basically involves the movement in recognising the importance of the class struggle ongoing in Ireland today, north and south, as a part of the struggle for national independence that must be taken as seriously as the armed struggle for the end of the British occupation of the North.

This debate took up most of the first day of the conference. During the debate significant statements were made concerning how Sinn Fein views the present stage in the war of liberation in the North. The years of struggle have made people much more sharply aware that a neo-colonial solution would be a hollow victory. Gerry Adams, the Vice-President, said:

> "The slogan 'Brits Out' on its own is not worth one day in Castlereagh, one day on the blanket, one dead comrade, or even one dead soldier."

The Irish Republican Army has not been defeated, will not be defeated, and its popular support is holding up well; all this is freely conceded by the British army. This means that the time may fast be approaching when political solutions will be sought in real seriousness. The movement is becoming acutely aware of the responsibilities of Sinn Fein to provide credible political options: "The British have realised that there can be no military victory, it is time the republicans also realised that there can be no military victory", said Gerry Adams. "We have to link up with other struggles and show our struggle is their struggle . . . We have to do in the 1980s the work we have neglected in the 1970s".

There are a number of reasons why the increased emphasis on social and economic struggles have arisen at this time. First, the young working class militants of the North have not been fighting for ten years only to wake up one day living in the same poverty and injustice as before, but under a green flag instead of an orange one. At the same time over these last ten years the nature of imperialism in Ireland has

changed so visibly that it is obvious to all that Britain as such is no longer the only agent of exploitation in Ireland. Japanese, German and American capital also dominate Irish life. International capital in some of its crudest and most blatantly exploiting forms are a daily fact of life for Irish workers, and the end of partition in itself would not stop this, indeed might even facilitatitate it.

Also during the last ten years the Southern Irish working class and small farmers have shown a level of militancy on economic issues which has emerged only sporadically in connection with the war in the North. The Republican movement has understood that the class struggle must be linked in practice with the national struggle if *either* is to succeed.

Finally, Sinn Fein has made wider and deeper contacts over the recent period with foreign socialist and nationalist movements, and has studied with great interest experiences such as that of the Portuguese revolution, and the way it was reversed, or at least securely set back, by the intervention of international capital. Lessons have been learned. There is realism and a sense of urgency about the problems facing any country attempting the project of socialism, but particularly one so closely tied to the European mainland and the tentacles of the EEC, and of NATO.

## Debate on Women

The second day of the conference was devoted to messages of support from foreign visitors, a renewal of Sinn Fein's policy of non-participation in national elections north and south, as long as Ireland remains divided. There was then an important debate on women, the first time this has been raised at a national conference. This was the culmination of a year of organising by Sinn Fein women on a new women's committee, to introduce women's rights into the policy documents. A women's commission has been set up to produce a full report on the position of women in Irish society and in the Republican Movement. There is no doubt as to the real significance of this debate: it does not represent merely window dressing at a time when no self-respecting socialist organisation can omit the woman question. No, this has arisen out of real social developments north and south, which have brought women themselves to the forefront of political activity. In the South the feminist movement has grown and proliferated over the last decade; in the North women have been crucial, and often dominant in the war effort, organising at all levels, from the Relatives Action Committee work in support of political status for the prisoners of war, through to the women volunteers in Armagh jail, whose commitment and bravery in their protest for political status has been an inspiration to all members, men and women.

The last big debate of the weekend was devoted to the question of political status and the condition of the H-Blocks and the prisoners of war in all the jails of Ireland and Britain. The overwhelming sense from the debate was that the men and women demanding political status will never give in, no matter what the cost, to being labelled criminals by the British forces of occupation. But the more sombre theme was the fear that coffins would be leaving Long Kesh before long if pressure could not be brought upon the British government to abandon their attempt to criminalise the political prisoners in Ireland.

**Portuguese revolutionary Otelo de Carvalho greets the Ard Fheis**

In concluding this report I would urge British socialists, and in particular trade unionists, to make every effort to understand the nature and development of Provisional Sinn Fein. The working class in Northern Ireland has not had open to it a kind of dense structure of democratic processes that exist in Britain from trade unions to the immense variety of local and single issue pressure groups. The Catholic community in Northern Ireland has had almost no political representation of any kind at any level for most of this century. The reformist traditions of democratic socialists in Britain are offended and outraged by the methods of the republican movement and by its radical political solutions to the problem of the Six Counties. These British socialist traditions were played upon by the Labour Party leadership at the last conference to swing the vote against the troops out resolutions. It is time British socialists tried to understand the different political solutions required in the highly undemocratic and unreformable six north-east counties of Ireland.

*Sue O'Halloran*
*PRO Sinn Fein (Britain)*
*Chairperson, Sinn Fein POW Department (Britain)*

# PTA Arrests

**Anne Doggett**

Since 1974, when the Prevention of Terrorism (Emergency Provisions) Act was first introduced in Britain, more than 4500 people, almost all Irish, have been detained under its provisions. Of these, 195 people have been deported, 249 have been charged with other offences, less than 50 have been charged under the Act itself and of these only 29 found guilty.

Despite the wide variation between the numbers arrested and those actually charged, let alone convicted, the use of this Act and its sweeping powers have very rarely been publicly discussed. The press has usually greeted the news of arrests with wild choruses of delight, proclaiming each time that IRA gunmen are being swept off British streets. The arrests of nearly 30 Irish people in December last year received similar treatment. This event and the experiences of the people detained shows clearly the type of operation the police (Anti-Terrorist Squad) are currently engaged in.

In the early hours of the morning of the 12th December, in raids involving hundreds of armed police in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Southampton, 26 men and women were arrested. All were held incommunicado and the majority were held for 4 days. The police refused to give any information and denied permission for solicitors to visit. (The solicitor for Paddy Prendiville, an assistant editor of *Hibernia*, took out a writ of Habeas Corpus after being denied permission to see him.). Those detained were subjected to various ordeals, including threats, humiliating treatment –

deprived of sleep, water, food and clothes – and kept in isolation. In some cases they were subjected to intense interrogation (every few hours) and physical assault. Val Green, a nurse working in East London, was assaulted and held naked, except for 2 filthy blankets, for 24 hours; she is now trying to bring a case of assault against the police. Information on the condition of others (who were later released) includes a description of a woman in her sixties who vomited continuously throughout the four days of her detention; the arrest of a man in his seventies; and of another, picked up in Southampton, who on his release had to be taken to a psychiatric wing of the Royal South Hants Hospital.

The day following the arrests it was publicly claimed through the press that this 'carefully planned' police operation had forestalled both a pre-Xmas bombing campaign and the assassination of public figures. The *Daily Express* jubilantly declared that 'the roundup', Operation Nimrod, seized 'suspected terrorists from their beds, one believed to be head of the Provos in Britain'. The *Daily Mail* confidently declared that those arrested were 'two IRA Active Service Units', 'killers hand-picked for a major operation'.

However, over the next few days despite these predictions, all except nine of those arrested (four women and five men) were eventually released. The nine have been charged with offences ranging from three conspiracy charges – withholding information about acts of terrorism and conspiracy to cause explosions (unspecified) and to effect an escape from gaol – plus two possession charges – possession of ammunition and firearms. Two of those charged with withholding information are now out on bail, the other seven have been remanded in custody in Brixton Prison.

| Year | Numbers detained | Numbers charged with offences | | | Numbers excluded | Not charged with offence or excluded |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Offence under Acts | Conspiracy to commit offence under Acts | Other offence | | |
| 1974 | 59 | – | – | 8 | 12 | 39 |
| 1975 | 1067 | 3 | – | 60 | 46 | 958 |
| 1976 | 1066 | 8 | – | 49 | 23 | 986 |
| 1977 | 853 | 6 | – | 38 | 17 | 792 |
| 1978 | 622 | 3 | – | 18 | 49 | 552 |
| 1979 | 857 | 29 | 29 | 47 | 48 | 704 |
| Total | 4524 | 49 | 29 | 220 | 195 | 4031 |

Percentage of detained charged with offence *under* the Acts: 1%.
Percentage of detained charged with *other* offences: 5.5%.
Percentage of detained charged with *any* offence: 6.5%.

Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Issue 1/80, 29 January 1980.

While at this stage, before the cases come to trial, it is not possible to anticipate the nature of the police evidence, nevertheless it is well known that in cases where there is little or no evidence the use of conspiracy charges makes it very difficult to disprove.

It is important to emphasise that these (December) arrests and charges are not isolated incidents: the arrests represent only the latest in a series of similar events which have taken place during the past four years. In 1979 alone, 857 people were arrested, over 200 more than in the previous year. The pattern which emerges from Home Office statistics* reveals that specific areas have come under heavy police activity, namely the ports and London. Since 1974 the highest number of detentions have occurred in the areas of Merseyside (1,101), the Metropolitan Police (999) and Dumfries and Gallway (828) while the highest number of extensions to detention orders have been in London (179 or 17.9% of those detained) and in Hampshire where 43% of the people arrested have been detained for longer than 48 hours.

The information concerning those charged under the Act shows that during the past four years the most widely used charge is Section 11, withholding information: 13 out of 49 people have been charged with this offence.

Other functions the Act performs are also made evident, in particular its use as a form of immigration control. In 1979 and '78 the numbers deported were twice as many as in 1977 and '76. In total 165 people have been 'removed' to Northern Ireland and 31 to the Republic.

* Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Issue 1/80, 29 January 1980.

**Other material**

1. NCCL, 'The PTAs 1974 and 1976', Catherine Scorer, 1976.
2. NCCL 'Briefing Paper on the Operation of the PTA', March 1979.
3. Brian Rose-Smith, 'Police Powers and Terrorism Legislation' in *Policing the Police*, March 1979, Caldor pubs.

# London Labour supports withdrawal

A resolution calling for British withdrawal from Northern Ireland was placed before the Annual Meeting of the Greater London Region of the Labour Party at the beginning of March. This conference represents some 91 constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), together with delegations from trade union regional committees, and socialist and Co-operative societies.

The organisation proposing the resolution was the Political Committee of the London Co-operative Society (PCLCS). This body had originally put forward a resolution calling on the Government 'to commit itself to a policy of withdrawal from Northern Ireland'. After compositing with amendments from Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP, Islington North CLP, and the South Suburban Co-operative Society, the following resolution was produced:-

'This Annual Meeting calls on the Parliamentary Labour Party to commit itself to a policy of withdrawal from Northern Ireland. Annual Meeting dissociates itself from the sterile 'bipartisan' posture which has in fact not led to a negotiated political solution in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, we welcome the decision of the NEC to set up a special sub-committee to review party policy on Ireland.

'In order to involve as many party members as possible in the work of this sub-committee we call on the NEC to ensure that:-

i) the sub-committee meets frequently (at least once a month)

ii) it invites CLPs and affiliated organisations to submit evidence and views on party policy on Northern Ireland

iii) that all such evidence and views submitted are made available to party members on request.'

Prior to the Annual Meeting the PCLCS had circulated CLPs in the Greater London area with a letter explaining their reasons for supporting a 'British withdrawal' resolution. They said:-

'Our aims are still those of the Better

Life for All Campaign – to end the violence, the discrimination, and the deprivation in Northern Ireland. However the policies of the last ten years have failed, and it is now clear that the aims of A Better Life for All cannot be achieved until there is a commitment to end British rule. This is the only policy which has not been tried, and the only one which deals with the *cause* as well as the symptoms of the Irish problem.'

The letter went on to endorse a recent statement made by Michael Mullen, the General Secretary of the Irish Transport & General Workers' Union, who argued that:

'. . . Once Britain declares in favour, not of instant withdrawal, but gradual disengagement, a tremendous impulse will be given to negotiation and reconciliation.'

An additional argument used by the PCLCS concerned the threat to democratic rights in the UK which comes from the experience of the British military in the techniques of 'low intensity operations' in Ireland i.e. policing a rebellious and disaffected population.

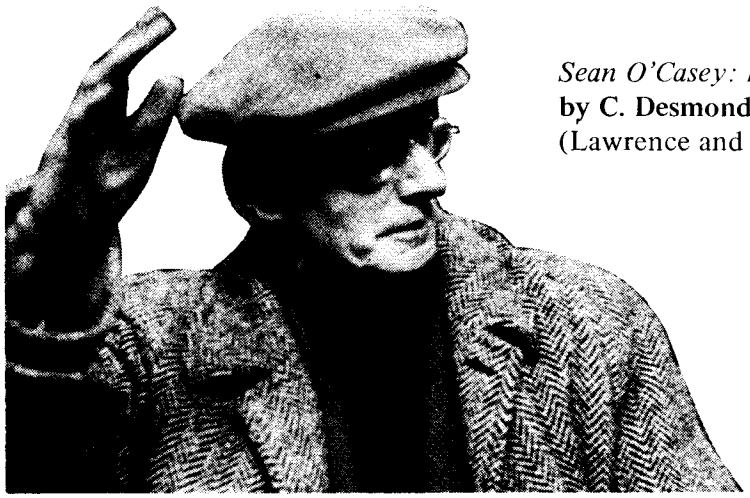
All these points were drawn out at length in the speech of the mover of the PCLCS resolution. In the ensuing debate, all but one of the delegates gave endorsement to the resolution, including the spokesperson for the Regional Executive Council.

In the subsequent card-vote, the resolution was carried by a margin of 10:1 in favour (1,012 for:101 against). In his speech at the end of the conference, the Chairman of the London Labour Party, Arthur Latham, described this as a significant decision and stated that he hoped the Labour Party in London would continue to pursue the subject of Ireland over the coming months.

The PCLCS resolution will be raised at other Regional Conferences in the near future. These include the Southern Regional Conference (22-23rd March, in Margate); the Labour Women's Conference (11-13th May, Malvern); and the Eastern Region Conference (21st June, Stevenage). No doubt the success at the London conference will raise expectations that more and more sections of the labour movement will be won to the argument in favour of British withdrawal from Ireland.

**Don Flynn**

# Reviews



*Sean O'Casey: Politics and Art*
**by C. Desmond Greaves**
(Lawrence and Wishart, 1979).

What about Sean O'Casey? Protestant/Unionist/Irish Irelander/Republican/Larkinite/Elite Artist/Agnostic/Communist.

He was all of these things, and more besides, but he was *always a political novice.* C. Desmond Greaves sifts all the evidence, and comes up with a very clear picture of O'Casey and his politics.

First some facts about O'Casey to contrast with what is generally believed.

**One,** he *never* lived in a slum, his family always had their own rooms, unlike the worst of the Dublin poor in the 1890s, when 4 or 5 families shared one room!

**Two,** in the *Life Story* O'Casey changed the sequence of events to suit himself, or for dramatic effect, and he was so bad on dates that he even got the year of his mother's death wrong! The Dublin wags saw the *Life Story* as O'Casey rewriting his life.

**Three,** O'Casey claims to have 'taught himself to read when he was fourteen', yet he was able to learn the part of the king in a scene from Richard II when he was eleven, and by that time he was mixing with actors. Not bad for a kid from the slums in the 1890s!

But who could blame him for boosting himself when, ill at ease, he was in the company of Dublin's literary giants, for whom life was so easy. Then again, as Greaves points out, we always have to be on the lookout for what O'Casey says, for 'divilment'.

Before 1916 O'Casey had resigned from the Irish Republican Brotherhood, because they would not throw in their lot with Labour, and from the Citizen Army because he could not agree to Constance Markievicz being a member of the Women's Volunteers (Cumann na mBan) *and* the Citizen Army; mind you, he'd always disliked her.

O'Casey could only hold one idea in his head at a time, and even after 1916 he was stuck at 'iron hearted ' Trade Unionism'. There was no chance of him understanding what Connolly was about, he had *no political education.* Sean O'Casey, the self-styled 'working class rebel who put socialism first', was well to the right of Connolly, and it took him another *25 years* to reach socialism!

## Easter 1916

O'Casey took no part in 1916, he was looking after his ailing mother. In any case, though he was prepared to die in a strike, he would not do so for a national revolt – or so he said. Nevertheless many of those killed in Dublin were his friends, and he was shattered, feeling the need to justify his absence. He even said, 'I heard about the Revolution, and tried to stop it', but there is no evidence of his trying, and who would have listened to *him* anyway? Easter 1916 haunted O'Casey for years, as Greaves puts it, 'the dead men were always hammering on his door'.

In 1917 O'Casey praised the Revolution, but by 1919 'it was all a terrible mistake', and 'the teachings of the pacifist Sheehy-Skeffington would have a greater influence than that of Connolly'.

So, what sort of plays did O'Casey write given his lack of political awareness? The three Irish plays *Shadow of a Gunman, The Plough and the Stars* and *Juno and the Paycock* were written during the Counter Revolution, a time of deep despair. All three plays showed a negative attitude to 1916, the people were seen as standing apart, and even hostile to the rebels. But worse, in *The Plough and the Stars* O'Casey has Nora Clitheroe say to her husband as he puts on his Citizen Army uniform, 'Your vanity will be the ruin of you,

and me, yet'. The working class Citizen Army going out to fight, for what, for vanity, for the lovely uniform!

In 1927 O'Casey wrote *The Silver Tassie*, an anti-war play, with a second act full of symbolism, breaking with the realistic style of the earlier plays, What a courageous thing to do! Not for him the safe realistic play that had made his name, and the Abbey Theatre a lot of money. The Abbey rejected *The Tassie*, and O'Casey, deeply hurt, left Ireland at the age of 46. But in *The Tassie*, where did O'Casey lay the blame for the 1914-18 war? On capitalism? No, on the church!

O'Casey now entered his Elite Artist period and wrote to Lady Gregory of the Abbey Theatre . . . We must continue to fight for that which is above and before all governments and parties – Art and literature which are the mantle and mirror of the Holy Ghost, and the sword of the spirit. As Greaves puts it, 'Art had become his substitute religion'.

O'Casey wrote many more plays, some good, some bad. He attacked the church, capitalism, fascism, and he praised youth, life, love and joy. In 1937 he became a communist, wrote constantly for the *Daily Worker* and was on the Board of Directors. Mind you, he could still come out with some wild sayings: he named Japan as the next Communist country!

Greaves ends this excellent book with this summing up, 'O'Casey retains his place as a foremost revolutionary dramatist, not because he understood the part, for he did not, but because all his work was informed by the vision as a whole'. Amen to that!

**Alex Farrell**

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*Poverty in the UK*
**by Peter Townsend**
(Penguin, 1979)

*Belfast Household Survey: Preliminary Report*
(Northern Ireland Housing Executive).

*Poverty in the UK* is basically a report on a comprehensive survey of 2052 households drawn from the 51 parliamentary constituencies of the UK in 1968/9. This is supplemented by special surveys of minority groups and of four selected poor areas – Salford, Neath, Glasgow and Belfast. Much of the book is a defence of the relevance of the survey findings today, as well as an attack on the limitations of government statistics for developing an accurate picture of complex patterns of 'class structuration'.

While in the early 1960s the rediscoverers of poverty (amongst whom Townsend was a key figure) were able to generate something of a constituency for Labour Party reformism to replace thirteen years of Tory rule, the political and ideological contexts of the 1980s are quite another matter. During the 'boom years', parliamentarians could afford to be concerned with 'social problems' whether or not presented as the 'by-products of industrial development'. Now the very survival of capital dominates the day to day affairs of the state. *Poverty in the UK* is not the sort of publication to capture the terrain now occupied by the radical right, or one which is of major value to the contemporary struggle of socialists. Most of the data, largely generalised at a UK level, lends itself only to very broad centralist 'social goals', such as those comprising Townsend's 'assault on poverty'. These targets include a statutory maximum possession of wealth and maximum income, the scrapping of social security benefits and income tax (to be replaced by a state regulated income fixed by a schedule of work merit and need, 'publicly agreed'), the right to work for all (including the elderly and disabled), more nationalisation, greater industrial democracy and restraint on professionalism, an extension of universal education, and more 'community development'. There is some ammunition in the book but little to inform local struggles over redundancies, social security benefits, housing, fuel bills, cuts in education and health services, and so on.

The chapter on 'the problem of poor areas' is a case in point. We learn nothing of the political economy and history of these areas or of the current state of social relations in them. Belfast (and Northern Ireland as a whole) wins the poverty league table on every count – but we knew this anyway and have better statistics to prove it. In addition the reader would discover that Northern Ireland is comprised of Catholic and Protestant areas and has experienced 'disorder and bloodshed' for the last ten years – but no hint as to why (poverty?!). Instead Townsend draws our attention to some quaint and archaic scenes . . .

> 'In my first visit to Belfast in 1968 . . . I was struck not only by the evident poverty in Catholic and Protestant areas alike, but by scenes which seemed to belong more to the 1930s – of red-haired boys using scales on a cart drawn by an emaciated pony to sell coal by the pound, teenage girls in a second-hand clothing shop buying underslips and skirts, and some of the smallest 'joints' of meat in the butchers' windows that I had ever seen'.

Of considerably more use and interest is the latest research publication of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The preliminary report on the Belfast household survey conducted in 1978 is the first explicit indication that the NIHE has to plan and manage housing on a sectarian basis. This is played down in the commentary, which is in any case sparse, but is certainly observable in the diagram and statistical tables which are broken down by electoral wards. With enough local knowledge it is not difficult to sort out the sectarian division in unemployment, housing conditions, incomes, internal migration patterns etc..

The report demonstrates that housing in Belfast has improved very little since the last surveys of 1974 and 1975, and in some areas has deteriorated. The situation in specific areas can be gauged reasonably well. For example, pensioners constitute nearly 50% of the Shankill population compared to 24% on the Falls whereas the latter has three times the number of one-parent families. In New Lodge 24% of families are headed by a single parent. The proportion of vacant dwellings in Protestant areas is relatively high, reflecting the very restricted choice of housing and 'safe' areas for Catholics. 93% of the houses in the Catholic Cromac ward were built before 1870 and 83% lack four of the standard amenities (the Shankill is almost as bad in this respect). On the Falls 51% of economically active households have an unemployed head of household (Whiterock 48%), compared to 14% on the Shankill. Twelve tables are devoted to migration and household formation which indicates that the report is principally designed as a planner's primer. No doubt someone is attempting to use it to prove that the as yet unbuilt Poleglass estate for West Belfast is unnecessary.

**Mike Tomlinson**

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## Books Received

Schools Council History Project, *The Irish Question*; Holmes McDougall (1977).
Eamonn McCann, *War and an Irish Town*; Pluto Press (1980; 2nd edition).
Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*; Pluto Press (1980; 2nd edition).
Austen Morgan and Bob Purdie (eds), *Ireland, Divided Nation, Divided Class*; Inklinks (1980).
*Troops on Turf: A Comprehensive Guide to Information on Ireland*; (15p from Just Books, 7 Winetavern St., Belfast BT1 1JQ).
Derry IRSP, *Seven Stars* (Quarterly Journal 30p from The Bookshop, 8 Chamberlain Street, Derry).

## Recent Publications of Interest

Prisoners Aid Committee, *Irish Voices from English Jails* (December 1979).
F.S.L.Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939*; Oxford University Press.

# ISR

The contents of previous issues of ISR have been described as 'forthright, analytic and comprehensive studies' by the journal *Troops Out*. It added that 'the articles in it are something that militants will want to keep for reference as well as to read now for information and political debate'.

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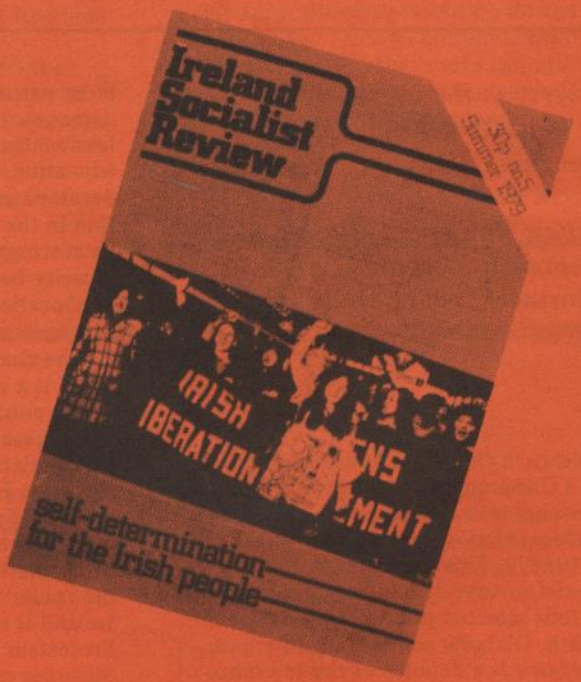


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  *Reviews (UDA, Fine Gael, Republicanism)*

- **NUMBER SIX (WINTER 1979/80)**
  *Multinationals and Ireland.*
  *Transcript of 1979 Labour Party Conference debate on Ireland.* **With introduction.**
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